Poison for The Toff

JOHN CREASEY

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Poison For The Toff

(The Toff On Ice)

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About the Author

John Creasey – Master Storyteller - was born in Surrey, England in 1908 into a poor family in which there were nine children, John Creasey grew up to be a true master story teller and international sensation. His more than 600 crime, mystery and thriller titles have now sold 80 million copies in 25 languages. These include many popular series such as *Gideon of Scotland Yard, The Toff, Dr Palfrey and The Baron*.

Creasey wrote under many pseudonyms, explaining that booksellers had complained he totally dominated the 'C' section in stores. They included:

> *Gordon Ashe, M E Cooke, Norman Deane, Robert Caine Frazer, Patrick Gill, Michael Halliday, Charles Hogarth, Brian Hope, Colin Hughes, Kyle Hunt, Abel Mann, Peter Manton, J J Marric, Richard Martin, Rodney Mattheson, Anthony Morton and Jeremy York.*

Never one to sit still, Creasey had a strong social conscience, and stood for Parliament several times, along with founding the *One Party Alliance* which promoted the idea of government by a coalition of the best minds from across the political spectrum.

He also founded the *British Crime Writers' Association*, which to this day celebrates outstanding crime writing. *The Mystery Writers of America* bestowed upon him the *Edgar Award* for best novel and then in 1969 the ultimate *Grand Master Award*. John Creasey's stories are as compelling today as ever.

Chapter One

Mr Rollison Throws A Party

'Must there be a crowd?' asked Rollison, glumly.

'On this occasion I think it would be wise, sir,' said his man. 'If you remember, there was a time when your birthday was always celebrated by a gathering of some distinction. During the war the custom was discontinued, but I think you would be ill-advised to invite only a few close friends. After all, it *is* an event.'

'I seem to be the only one who doesn't think so,' said Rollison, leaning back in an armchair. He was dressed in flannels and a tweed jacket, and his cream, open-neck shirt made his tanned face look very brown. Looking up unexpectedly, he caught a glimpse of a smile on Jolly's face. It faded immediately, but it brought a new note to Rollison's voice. 'Jolly,' he said, sternly, 'tell me the truth. Why are you trying to wish this on me?'

'Indeed I am not, sir!' Jolly protested.

'Then who is?' Rollison continued vigorously. 'If it's a relative, let him be the one to throw the party.'

Jolly shuffled his feet a little uncomfortably.

'Well sir, I believe that Lady Gloria would gladly do so, but her house is being repainted and—'

'Oh,' said Rollison. 'So Glory is up to her old tricks again. Well, let's get this straight. Apart from the fact that I do not *want* to throw a party, there isn't room in the flat.'

'With the folding doors open, we *have* accommodated fifty,' Jolly murmured.

'Fifty? Nonsense! The authorities would be down on me in no time!'

'They could hardly do that with Superintendent Grice among the guests,' said Jolly, blandly.

'So, you have even prepared the invitation list,' said Rollison. He sat back and regarded his man in silence, then hoisted himself out of his chair. 'I will go further into this,' he said, darkly. 'Do nothing until I come back.'

It was a warm spring day, and as Rollison reached the pavement the sunlight glistened on his dark hair and showed up the few streaks of grey at the temples. He looked tired, and a little aimless, as if he had lost his zest for adventure.

At the end of Gresham Terrace, he hailed a taxi. The driver pulled up. 'The Marigold Club, Bedford Square,' Rollison said, and sank back at ease, idly watching the first gay frocks of the season. He was mildly amused by most of what he saw, but not deeply interested; in fact he was not particularly interested in anything.

He was day-dreaming when the cab pulled up, a woman's face in his mind's eye.

‘This right, sir?’ asked the cabby.

‘Oh yes,’ said Rollison. ‘Thanks.’

He stood outside the grey stone house, looking at the fanlight, on which was painted in gold: *The Marigold Club.* By the large window, open a little at the top, three elderly women were watching him with close attention. When he went in, a middle-aged woman in a spotless but not very becoming uniform approached and asked in a hushed voice: ‘Have you an appointment, sir?’

‘No,’ said Rollison, ‘but I have an aunt.’

‘I’m afraid—’

‘Lady Gloria Hurst,’ said Rollison. ‘Take her my card, please.’

He handed his card to the woman, who looked doubtful, but obediently turned away. Rollison waited until she went upstairs. He heard whispering voices from the room which led off the hall, and had no doubt that the three elderly ladies had left the window and were now nearer the door.

He could not understand what had possessed Old Glory to come to live in such a place as this. A club for elderly widows and spinsters, it undoubtedly served an admirable purpose; but it seemed an odd environment for his Aunt Gloria.

Another maid appeared. Rollison looked at her with surprised attention, for she was the youngest creature he had ever seen within the precincts of the Marigold Club.

‘Are you Mr Rollison, sir?’

‘Yes,’ said Rollison.

‘Lady Gloria would like you to come to her room, please. Will you follow me?’

As he followed the girl, Rollison reflected that it was the first time he had been taken beyond the dining-room or the lounge. He was favourably impressed; there was nothing here of the dingy atmosphere of a man’s club, yet there was nothing ostentatiously modern and bright. Comfort and good taste were reflected in the passages and in the rooms which he could see through open doorways.

Aunt Glory, it appeared, lived on the first floor. She was sitting in the window at a beautiful Louis Quinze writing table. Rollison noticed with another flash of surprise that the large, airy room was exquisitely furnished. Duck egg blue walls and carpet, fragile period pieces, long curtains at the lofty windows, everything struck a pleasing note; even his Aunt Gloria.

‘Well, Rolly,’ she said, offering him her cheek.

Rollison did his duty.

‘Well, Glory,’ he answered, and stood looking at her.

She was as tall as he, dressed in mannish tweeds, with her plentiful white hair piled up in Regency fashion. There was something attractive about her full lips, faintly outlined in pink; he thought, also, that rouge accounted for some of the colour in her cheeks.

‘Sit down, for heaven’s sake,’ said Aunt Gloria briskly. ‘I suppose it’s no use offering you coffee at twelve o’clock. There isn’t a very good cellar here,

but I can run to a whisky-and- soda.' She rang the bell.

'This must be the only club in London which offers really good service,' said Rollison, sitting down in an easy chair and drawing it closer to hers. She pushed a silver box towards him, and he selected a cigarette thoughtfully. 'You have been exerting undue influence on Jolly,' he declared at last, 'and you've ordered him to tell me nothing about the conspiracy.' He gave her a light. 'Is it fair?' he added, his voice rising to a note of grievance.

'What makes you think that?' demanded Lady Gloria.

'I know you, and I know Jolly. What *is* all this about a birthday party at the flat? Why must I advertise my age? I'm too near forty to bruit it abroad.'

'Good gracious,' exclaimed Aunt Gloria, 'and they call women vain!'

'Evasion will serve no purpose,' said Rollison. 'I think—' He broke off, for the door opened. The young maid brought in a tray, with whisky, a syphon and glasses, and put it on the writing table.

'All right, Maud, thank you,' said Aunt Gloria, and the girl went out quietly.

'Did she guess what you wanted?' demanded Rollison, in pleased surprise.

'I told her what to bring if I rang,' said Aunt Glory. 'Help yourself, and I'll have soda with a splash of whisky.' She sipped thoughtfully. 'What is remarkable about having a birthday party? Yours used to be one of the events of London.'

'Aha! So you *do* admit that you put Jolly up to this?'

Aunt Gloria gave a small, dry smile.

'We have talked about it, certainly.'

'So you think that Jolly, alone, is insufficient to order my life,' said Rollison, with a touch of acerbity.

Aunt Gloria snapped: 'I think your life is run far too much by Jolly!'

'Oh,' said Rollison, startled. He knew from the tone of her voice that she meant what she said. He sipped again, and watched her eyes, which were stormy and almost angry.

'I never expected to live to see you absolutely – *spine* less, Richard, and spineless is the only word to describe you since you left the Army.'

'You'd better blame it on to Whitehall,' said Rollison, defensively.

'I shall do nothing of the kind,' retorted Aunt Gloria. 'I know why it is, and you know also. There was a time when you had fire in you, but there hasn't been a flicker of flame for the last six months, to my certain knowledge. You're—'

'Spineless,' murmured Rollison.

'Soft! Flabby! Lifeless! I wonder that you dared to come here without an appointment, since you know the rules. I suppose I ought to take some encouragement from that,' Aunt Gloria added, with a lift of her chin. 'No, it is *not* reaction after the war. It is *not* because you have nothing to do – in the past you went out and found something. Have you been to the East End *once* in the last three months?'

His lips puckered into a smile.

'Just once,' he said. 'Someone threw a birthday party. It was terrible.'

‘Have you seen anyone at Scotland Yard?’

‘Not lately,’ admitted Rollison.

‘There was a time when you haunted the place.’

‘And all my relatives, including you, most strongly disapproved of my interest in criminals and the law,’ murmured Rollison.

‘You know very well that I did not disapprove. I was glad to see one member of the family with some—’

‘Is “guts” the word?’ asked Rollison, tentatively. Aunt Gloria took a long drink, and then thrust her glass away from her with a gesture of annoyance.

‘I’m glad you haven’t lost your tongue, anyhow, there’s some small gleam of hope in that. Is it true that *twice* in the last few months you have refused to help Superintendent Grice?’

Rollison started. ‘Is Grice in this, too?’

‘Certainly not,’ said Aunt Gloria. ‘Jolly told me about it. For the first time in ten years you did not jump at the chance of helping in a case—’

‘Now, come!’ protested Rollison. ‘Spineless, flabby, soft and lifeless I may be, but I know when a case is worth time and trouble. Neither of those in which Grice tried to interest me were. He got his man within forty-eight hours, by normal routine work. I don’t have to waste my time.’

‘Can you account for a single day on which you haven’t wasted it in the last—’

‘Few months,’ Rollison completed for her, and added with dignity: ‘I have been resting.’

Aunt Gloria said robustly: ‘You mean you have been brooding. You, the liveliest man in London, a man consulted a hundred times by the police, a man who really did some good in his own way, who spent his money well, who showed every sign of having a conscience and not wanting to wallow in luxury provided by his forebears, a man whom every newspaper in the country regarded as first-class news, who—’

‘Steady!’ pleaded Rollison.

‘It’s all true,’ declared Aunt Gloria, vigorously. ‘There was real spirit in you – once. I’ve heard it said that you looked on life as a crusade—’

‘Oh no!’ gasped Rollison, with a horrified grimace.

‘But I have,’ said Aunt Gloria, firmly, ‘and it was true. You adopted the poor people of the East End and they loved you for it, you did more than any man to smooth out the difficulties between petty criminals and the police; you had more influence than any man in London in the East End, and —’ She paused, and looked at him as if she were daunted by the thought of what she was going to say.

He did not look away from her, but his eyes narrowed and his lips were pressed tightly together. She drew a deep breath, and went on: ‘Well, you *have* asked for it. You’re throwing away everything you’ve built up because you fell in love with a married woman.’

There was a long silence. A car drew up outside and a door slammed, but there was no other sound. The sunlight shining into the room was caught by the glasses and the decanter, and reflected yellow circles on to the far wall.

Abruptly, Aunt Gloria pushed her chair back.

'I'm sorry, Rolly,' she said briskly. 'I shouldn't have said that. You must forgive me.'

A faint smile touched Rollison's lips.

'You needn't be sorry,' he said. 'You're partly right, of course. It wasn't because she was married, it was because she was madly in love with her husband.' He laughed mirthlessly. 'I didn't realise that I'd made it as obvious as that. My turn to apologise.'

'Six months is a long time to brood, my dear,' said Gloria gently.

'Oh, much too long,' admitted Rollison. 'But will a birthday party work a miracle of recovery?' He laughed again, this time with a tinge of amusement. 'All right, let's have the party, let me rehabilitate myself, let me —'

'Now you're being childish!' snapped Aunt Gloria.

'Let me take up the crusader's sword again,' went on Rollison, with brittle gaiety. 'Arrange for a murder to be committed while the revelry is at its height or else stage a burglary, do anything you like, but *don't*—' He stopped abruptly.

'Don't what?' demanded Aunt Gloria.

After a pause, Rollison said: 'You're not thinking of trying to throw some lovely, luscious young creature at my head, are you? You wouldn't go that far?'

'I would *not,'* said Gloria scathingly. 'I have some regard for the hardness of your head and that of the hypothetical young woman.'

'Thank you very much.' Rollison finished his drink. 'Now I'd better go and put Jolly out of his misery, and leave you to the company of ghosts and creaking bones. Who on earth called this place the *Marigold* Club?'

'I did,' said Aunt Gloria. 'It's a colour I've always admired.' She took his hand. 'Interfering I may be, but it's done me good to see you, Rolly.'

'I'll tell you whether you've done *me* good after the party,' promised Rollison.

Chapter Two

The Party

There were thirty-eight guests, after all, and the flat was uncomfortably full, although no one seemed to notice it. With the folding doors back and the bedroom furniture stored somewhere by Jolly, the two biggest rooms had become one. The small hall was buffet and bar combined, and there was ice-cream served at a counter by a hilarious young woman who had displaced a maid sent from the caterers. She was gaily calling her wares.

Aunt Gloria sat in a corner, always surrounded by admirers; Superintendent Grice was there, a tall man with a bony face of some distinction. Two Inspectors and a Detective Sergeant from Scotland Yard were also present, a fact of which several of Rollison's more correct relatives disapproved. The Press was well represented, and among the others were people whom Rollison only vaguely recognised. It dawned on him after a very little while that Jolly and Aunt Gloria, doubtless with some help from Grice, had invited the more likeable people whom he had helped at one time or another.

A red-haired girl with a vague manner was Sheila Gregory whom he had met in a mystery which had led him to a poultry farm. A hefty man who looked ill-at-ease in a dinner-jacket was a dock manager in the East End. Tall, fair-haired, contented Ronald Kemp and his wife were there. Kemp was a curate in an East End parish; he had once been in serious trouble, from which Rollison had helped him.

Undoubtedly, thought Rollison, it was good to see them all. Now and again he caught Aunt Gloria's eye, and winked, to show her that she was forgiven.

'Oh, Rolly, darling!' A voice at his side made him turn round. He looked into the pretty face of Mary Henderson, a girl in the early twenties, whom he knew had recently been in the WAAF. Her fair hair was a little untidy, and she was eating ice-cream. 'It's a perfectly wizard party! Isn't it, Tips?'

'Tips' was a somewhat forlorn looking young man, who was caught with his mouth full.

'Oh, sure,' he said at last.

'And all these gorgeous things, what are they?' asked Mary, pointing her spoon at a small object inside a case which rested on brackets in the wall. 'I mean, what *is* in that wizard little glass tube?'

There were many other seemingly unrelated things hanging beside it. For that particular wall was the repository of souvenirs of his criminal cases. There were odd-shaped knives, small revolvers and guns, a clerical collar – that had been presented to him by Ronald Kemp – and a great variety of oddments, all of which held a particular interest for him. Rarely however could he be persuaded to talk of them.

‘That’s a white powder,’ he said briefly.

‘Of course, twit, I can see *that,’* said Mary, ‘but what *is* the white powder? Rolly! It isn’t poison, is it? You wouldn’t have anything *dangerous* hanging on the wall, would you?’

Without waiting for a reply, she seized Tip’s hand and they forged a way, laughing, through the crowd.

Grice came across, and stood looking at the collection. He was smiling faintly, and Rollison watched him and waited for his comment.

‘I suppose you know that half of what you’ve got there should be in the Black Museum at Scotland Yard,’ remarked Grice at last. ‘What’s in the tube?’

‘White arsenic from the Jamieson case,’ said Rollison. ‘Don’t let it worry you, the cabinet is locked. Everything that could have been taken away surreptitiously has been removed. I don’t want to lose a lifetime’s collection. How’s crime?’

‘I’ve known it brisker,’ said Grice.

‘Quiet times for policemen,’ said Rollison, with a grin. ‘That’s a blow for Aunt Gloria. Do you know everyone present?’

Grice laughed. ‘No. Do you?’

‘I’ve placed them all but three,’ said Rollison, looking about him. ‘The little fellow with the hooked nose, for instance, is a stranger, I’m sure I’ve never seen him before. Jolly can’t remember him, either, but he might be a relative’s fiancé. There’s the dark-haired woman, too, with the exotic manner and the flaming red dress. You know the one I mean?’

‘Yes,’ said Grice. ‘I was introduced to her.’

‘Do you remember the name?’

‘Morral,’ said Grice.

‘Oh, yes,’ said Rollison, ‘I vaguely remember there was a Morral marriage in the last year or two. My mother’s side,’ he added, absently. ‘And the other mystery guest is the man with the beard and the military manner.’

‘I’ve carefully evaded him,’ said Grice. ‘I saw the suffering faces of three people he had cornered, and I heard the word “India”, so—’

‘Isn’t he a dear, Rolly?’ asked Sheila Gregory, her red head appearing as if from nowhere, her husband in close attendance. ‘Your parson, I mean, I’d never realised that Church of England parsons could be so sweet.’ She looked at Rollison as if he were the only man worthy of attention, but her husband smiling behind her appeared to be supremely content. Rollison was surprised, for he had doubted the success of that marriage. ‘You do know who I mean, don’t you?’ asked Sheila. ‘The tall, handsome man, Hemp or Kent or something like that. Was he a criminal, too?’

A majestic-looking woman who was bearing down on Rollison, stopped in her tracks and raised her lorgnette; she was one of Rollison’s aunts.

‘Why should you think the parson was a criminal?’ asked Grice, interestedly.

‘Oh, I thought everyone here was,’ said Sheila. ‘In some way or other, I mean.’

The Aunt beckoned Rollison with great dignity.

'Could you mean "criminologist"?' suggested Gregory.

'Isn't "criminal" short for that?' asked Sheila sweetly, and then pulled Rollison's arm, making him bend down. 'Rolly, darling, as soon as you've got live minutes to spare I want to speak to you, we've some thrilling news, haven't we, Alec?'

'Now look here—' began Gregory.

'Richard!' called the Aunt, impatiently.

'Please don't forget,' pleaded Sheila. 'Alec, darling, do you think we could fight our way towards the buffet? I'm ravenous. Goodbye for a while Rolly, and don't forget to spare us five minutes before the party's over.'

'Richard!' boomed the Aunt.

'I'll keep everyone else away,' murmured Grice.

'Thanks,' said Rollison, gratefully, and turned to the Aunt with an apologetic smile. 'Hallo, Aunt Mattie, I've been trying—'

'Is there a corner in this bear garden where we can talk quietly and sensibly for three minutes?' demanded the Aunt, with an air of over-tried patience.

'Quiet?' asked Rollison doubtfully. 'Well, there's the bathroom. We might be lucky there.'

'What about Jolly's room?'

'It's being used for coats and there's a fluctuating attendance,' said Rollison, taking her arm. 'It's years since I saw you, Aunt Mattie. When did you start coming to London again?'

'In June,' said Aunt Mattie. 'Richard, I must speak to you seriously.' She led the way to the bathroom, and as they reached the door a slim girl with heavy make-up came out. She winked as if in sympathy with Rollison. The Aunt glared at her, and then swept into the room, closed the door, and stood with her back against it.

'Richard, what *is* that woman doing here?'

'What woman?' demanded Rollison, puzzled.

'You know very well whom I mean. That—'

'You can't mean Sheila,' said Rollison, with a laugh. 'She is quite harmless, and nothing like the fool she looks. The red- haired girl. She runs a poultry farm.'

'I am not interested in the eccentricities of your friends,' declared Aunt Mattie loftily. 'I'm interested only in that woman.'

'Not Sheila?' murmured Rollison.

He tried to hide his impatience and his dislike of his aunt, but it was not easy. She was thin-featured and acid-tongued, and she was a sworn enemy of his favourite aunt, Lady Gloria. Rollison imagined that Gloria had used the party for her own purposes, perhaps to extend an olive branch to her sister-in- law; if so, there was no evidence that the branch had been grasped.

'Playing the fool ill becomes you,' said Aunt Mattie, sharply. 'You know very well I mean Derek's wife. Though I can hardly bring myself to call her his *wife.'*

‘Derek’s wife?’ repeated Rollison blankly.

‘Oh, you’re impossible! I mean Katrina Morral.’

‘*Katrina!’* exclaimed Rollison, and immediately he had a mental picture of the exotic-looking woman, and remembered that the family had been scandalised when Derek Morral, his cousin, had returned from three years in Moscow, where he had been acting as liaison officer, bringing with him an attractive but mysterious wife.

‘Well, why shouldn’t she be here?’ Rollison asked.

‘Richard!’

‘Now come and sit down on the side of the bath and tell me what’s worrying you,’ said Rollison, firmly. ‘If you stand there you will get a smack in the—er—back when the door opens, and it’s bound to open when someone wants to tidy up.’ He held Aunt Mattie’s hand, but she refused to be placated.

‘The woman has left him again,’ she said frostily.

‘Katrina left Derek?’ asked Rollison, startled.

‘Do you mean to tell me that you did not know that she has twice run away from him?’

‘I’d no idea.’

‘That, I suppose, is an extenuating circumstance,’ conceded Aunt Mattie. ‘I felt sure that you would not have committed such a solecism as to invite her, had you known. However, she *is* here. I have deliberately avoided her, of course, but I find the position intolerable, and I shall leave at once. I am surprised that Gloria finds it possible to stay in the same room as the creature.’

‘Perhaps she hasn’t heard the shocking truth,’ murmured Rollison.

‘You cannot tell me that there is any piece of family gossip or scandal which your Aunt Gloria does not know,’ said Aunt Mattie, spitefully. ‘Well, that is the situation, Richard, and I am sure you do not need telling where your duty lies.’

‘Duty?’

‘Since Katrina had accepted an invitation from a member of the family, it would appear that she had repented her rash action,’ said Aunt Mattie. ‘You, as the senior male member of the family present, should ask her whether she intends to return to Derek and behave herself, or whether—’

The door burst open.

‘Oh, hallo,’ said Sheila, brightly. ‘What are you two doing in here together?’ She shook a forefinger roguishly at Aunt Mattie. ‘Rolly, sweet, do disappear, I’ve broken a shoulder strap, and Jolly said I would find a needle and cotton in here. Or a pin. *Do* fly. And keep Alec away from that simply devastating Russian beauty, won’t you? Your Aunt Gloria has just introduced them, and I don’t think that *any* man would be safe with her for long. Bye-bye!’

Aunt Mattie said: ‘Richard. You understand—’

‘Oh, yes,’ said Rollison, hastily. ‘I understand perfectly. Perfectly.’

He shut the door behind him with a heady feeling of escape, and made

his way back to his guests. He noticed Katrina's brilliant red dress at once, and saw that she was talking to Alec Gregory, who looked somewhat ill-at-ease. Near them, Aunt Gloria was fanning herself. On her face was a look of great satisfaction. Rollison felt sure that she had had some ulterior motive in bringing Katrina here.

Somewhere, Mary was saying: 'Oh, absolutely wizard. You *must* come and see the arsenic, too. Rolly said it was only a harmless powder, but of course that's only boloney. It's over here.' She now had two young men in tow, and crossed the room heedless of those in her path. They made way for her, indulgently.

Rollison bore down on Aunt Gloria, and was near her when he was startled by a cry that was nearly a scream. Everyone stopped talking, staring, their mouths half open towards Mary.

She was pointing at the wall, and into the dead silence she gasped: 'It's gone! The arsenic's gone!'

Chapter Three

‘Among Those Missing’

Rollison looked across to the door leading to the hall. Jolly was already moving towards it, and from another direction the police sergeant, a man with a shock of yellow hair which stood almost straight up from his forehead, was also heading for the door. Jolly saw that, and immediately turned and made his way towards the kitchen, from which led the fire-escape.

The girl who had taken over the ice-cream counter, a little brunette named Florence Hardy, stopped spooning out her wares.

Rollison caught Grice’s eye.

He was conscious of the tension, of the uneasiness, which was spreading through the room. People began to look oddly towards one another, some almost accusingly. Aunt Mattie, who had returned from the bathroom, was staring with unveiled malignance towards Katrina.

A voice muttered: ‘Why doesn’t someone *say* something?’

‘Attention, everyone, please,’ called Rollison, and heads turned towards him with clock-like precision. ‘A little joke of Mary’s that has gone too far. Now do relax, all of you.’

‘Rolly!’ Mary’s cheeks became a flaming red.

‘If anything is missing, it will prove to be a practical joke that has misfired – or an accident,’ said Rollison, ‘and whoever has a tube of boracic acid won’t be able to do any harm with it.’

‘It was arsenic,’ insisted Mary hotly, ‘I heard *him* ask you, and you told a man it was a souvenir of the Jamieson case. Deny that, if you can!’

‘Charge denied,’ said Rollison, lying cheerfully. ‘Do stop looking as if we’ve been through an earthquake,’ he added. ‘There is plenty of liquor and victuals, and—’

Out of the bathroom Sheila came running, gay of eye and clearly on top of the world. She darted across the room towards Alec Gregory and Katrina, and somehow her high spirits eased the tension. Couples began to talk, someone laughed, there was another descent upon the ice-cream, for the flat was now uncomfortably warm.

Aunt Gloria, looking very pleased with life, waved her fan to and fro.

Rollison and Grice went towards her. She glanced up with a bland smile.

‘Now see what you’ve done,’ said Rollison, half-amused, half-angry. ‘Hand over the poison tube, Glory, and don’t let’s play any more childish tricks.’

‘I haven’t moved from here for at least an hour,’ said Aunt Gloria placidly.

‘Maybe, but you’ve had a constant stream of admirers,’ said Rollison. ‘Which of them brought you the tube?’

Aunt Gloria looked at Grice, and demanded: ‘Have you any influence over him, Superintendent? If so, can you get it into his obstinate head that I have

had nothing to do with this mystery?'

'You would find convincing me a hard job,' said Rollison. 'Seriously, Glory, this has gone beyond a joke. As a matter of fact, between you and me, it *was* arsenic.'

'Then the indiscretion was yours. I can only assure you again that I did not touch the tube of arsenic,' said Glory, firmly.

Reluctantly, Rollison accepted her assurance.

He was the more reluctant at the implication that someone in the room had deliberately stolen the tube. For there was enough arsenic in it to kill half-a-dozen people.

Grice murmured: 'I was half-afraid of something like this.'

'Let us all be wise after the event,' said Rollison, tartly. 'Well, what's been done? Jolly's watching the fire-escape and Breem is at the front door, they'll make sure that no one goes out until you've given instructions.' He rubbed his chin, worriedly. 'But we can't search everyone who wants to go. There's Aunt Mattie stalking towards the door already, so we need a plan of action, at once. First, we must find who's among the missing.' He was looking about the rooms, and one man's absence was noticeable: the bearded man who had been boring people about India.

The small man with the hooked nose had also disappeared.

Aunt Gloria said sweetly: 'The master minds don't seem to be working very quickly.'

'But they're working,' said Rollison, 'and here's a job for you, Glory, fit punishment for your sins. Sit in the hall, will you, and identify everyone who wants to leave. Protest if it's someone of whom you're doubtful, and Sergeant Breem – the man with the shock of fair hair – will take any necessary action. No argument,' he added, firmly, 'you started this, you know.'

'Exactly what will happen if Breem tries to prevent anyone from leaving?' demanded Aunt Gloria, mischievously.

'All you have to worry about are the credentials of the people who suddenly want to leave,' said Rollison.

Grice had gone to speak to Jolly. Rollison joined them. No one had tried to leave by the fire-escape, Jolly told them, and he did not think it likely that anyone would try now. There was a slight possibility that someone had already gone out that way, because the back door had been left wide open, to let some fresh air into the flat.

'What now?' Rollison asked Grice.

'We haven't examined the glass case where the arsenic was kept,' said Grice.

'Mary could have made a mistake,' mused Rollison, 'but I don't think that's very likely.' He looked rueful. 'I shall have to apologise for being so caustic at her expense, too, she's probably livid with me.' He shrugged his shoulders, and made his way with Grice towards the collection of souvenirs.

A quick examination of the case in which the tube of arsenic had been kept made what had happened clear enough. The glass had been broken,

and it was hardly surprising that, in the babble, no one had heard it. The glass was thin, and a quick, sharp blow had doubtless been enough to smash it.

Grice said: 'I suppose someone could have put their elbow through it by accident.'

'Then where's the tube?' said Rollison. He looked down at the floor, but there was nothing to be seen, no trace of white powder, not even broken glass; the pieces were all inside the case. 'Wilful damage,' he declared, 'we must check up on who's gone home lately.'

It was surprising how many people wanted to leave then and there. The spirit had gone out of the party, and even Sheila could not revive it for long. Ronald Kemp was talking animatedly to a little group of people, and Rollison heard the word 'arsenic' repeated over and over again.

The two police inspectors went into the hall to help Breem and Aunt Gloria. Four or five other people were waiting there, impatient and a little annoyed at not being allowed to leave without a fuss. Two were women, three were men.

Rollison stopped in the doorway, and said: 'I'll have to leave this to you, old man.'

'Thanks,' said Grice, drily. 'I can handle the men, but as for the women—'

'That is a task for Aunt Glory,' declared Rollison.

He felt ill-at-ease about the whole business. Friends and acquaintances would have to submit to being searched, and there were bound to be some who would resent it. He wondered whether Glory was doing her job thoroughly, and, after a quarter of an hour, peeped into the hall. Gloria had enlisted the help of Sheila and Ronald Kemp's wife, and all, apparently, was well. Rollison gave a sigh of relief; but it was not to last for long. Turning, he found Mary barring his way.

Her face was set, and by her side was the monosyllabic Tips.

'Why, hallo,' said Rollison, brightly. 'I say, Mary, I *am* sorry, but—'

'You deliberately insulted me,' said Mary, coldly, 'and I can't forgive you. If Tips were a *man*,' she added with withering scorn, 'he would make you do more than pretend you're sorry. Anyone would think *I* stole the beastly arsenic.'

'Now, come,' protested Rollison, 'I had to prevent a scare, and the only way I could do it was to be hard on you. It was in the public interest, you know.'

'It made me look a fool,' said Mary, unforgivingly, 'is that in the public interest?' There were spots of angry red on her cheeks. She turned away from Rollison, abruptly, and said: 'Take me home, Tips.'

'Can't do, at the moment,' said Tips with some embarrassment. 'There's a queue, waiting to be searched.'

'To be *what*?'

'Searched,' said Tips. 'Fact. Sorry.'

'Do you mean to say I'm going to be forced to submit to *another* indignity?' cried Mary.

‘Well, your fault you know,’ said Tips, flushing a dull pink. ‘If you hadn’t caused the sensation, it wouldn’t have happened. Not like this. Ought to have just said a word to Mr Rollison.’ The flush receded, and his voice grew stronger. ‘Sorry,’ he said, and picked up his plate of melting ice-cream. He put the spoon in his mouth, then suddenly stopped.

‘You—’ began Mary, and then turned and hurried towards the hall. She had not had a good evening, thought Rollison; but Tips was right, she had asked for much of what she had received.

Tips put his hand to his lips. Only Rollison was with him.

‘Something pricked me,’ he said, in surprise. ‘I— ah!’ He lowered his spoon and in it was a tiny piece of glass. ‘I wonder how *that* got there. Nasty, isn’t it?’

‘Nasty is hardly the word,’ said Rollison, grimly. He raised his voice, startling the few guests who remained. ‘I’d like everyone who’s eating ice-cream to stop,’ he called, and the tone of his voice warned the guests of some impending sensation. Four people abruptly put down their plates, and Grice came hurrying from the hall. ‘The fact is,’ went on Rollison, as he drew up, ‘Tips has found a piece of broken glass in his ice-cream.’

‘Great Scott!’ gasped Grice. ‘Here—’

He turned and half-ran towards the ice-cream container. Several other people came up to watch him. He spooned out a heap of ice-cream, and spread it on a plate. There were two or three suspicious little blobs, and he touched them with his finger; two contained a fragment of glass.

‘What the dickens *is* the matter?’ demanded Ronald Kemp, in bewilderment. ‘I’ve just been eating that stuff.’

‘Then you want an emetic, and you want it quickly,’ said Rollison. ‘So does everyone else who’s eaten the stuff since the arsenic was missed. Because it looks as if the tube went into the ice-cream bucket, and that means—’

‘No!’ gasped Flo Hardy, jumping forward. ‘No, it couldn’t have done, it— oh, I’m going to be sick. I know I’m going to be sick. I’ve eaten lashings of it.’ She looked white and ill. ‘Oh, I feel dreadful!’

The faces of Ronald Kemp and several others were as pale as her own.

Chapter Four

After The Show

Rollison put the morning newspapers aside, and lit a cigarette. He could hear Jolly moving about the flat, clearing up after the party of the previous night. Although the windows were wide open tobacco smoke seemed to be everywhere, mixed with the faint smell of whisky and gin. Rollison, however, was not thinking of these things.

Jolly looked in at the door.

'Is there anything else you want, sir?' he asked, almost timidly. 'A little more hot water or milk?'

'No, thanks,' said Rollison. 'Breakfast in twenty minutes.'

'Very good, sir,' said Jolly, and went quietly away.

Rollison bathed and shaved, wholly absorbed in contemplation and reliving in his mind what had happened the previous night. Before he had allowed the remaining guests to leave the flat, he had summoned a doctor. A group of miserable people had been taken to a nearby nursing home, and probably they were still miserable, although Rollison had already telephoned and been assured that none of them was seriously ill.

That had been only one of the consequences.

Grice and the police had immediately sent out an SOS calling on all who had been to the party and warning them of the danger. Most of them had submitted to medical aid, but some, including Aunt Mattie, had refused to pay serious attention to the warning. It was possible that these would suffer for it; he was waiting apprehensively for a telephone call.

It had been three o'clock before he had gone to bed, too exhausted to attempt to solve what lay behind the mystery. There was one superficial explanation: that someone had planned wholesale murder. Such an explanation might satisfy sensation seekers, but was too unlikely to appeal seriously to Rollison.

The discovery had been made a little before midnight, and so had given the Press ample time to make the fullest capital out of the story. One of the newspapers had run a sensational article, inferring that it *had* been a deliberate attempt at mass poisoning, however, and several others had hinted at it.

'But before we start suspecting,' murmured Rollison, 'it is necessary to know *why* it was done.'

His talk with Aunt Gloria at the Marigold Club now seemed a long way off. At the time he had been inclined to agree that he needed lifting out of his moodiness, but attempted slaughter in his own flat was altogether too drastic a way of doing it.

'Breakfast is served, sir,' announced Jolly.

Jolly could have spent little time in bed. The stale aftermath of the party

had now magically disappeared. Outside, the morning was dull and sluggish, a slight drizzle barely stirring the air.

Rollison was drinking his last cup of coffee when the telephone bell rang. He looked at the instrument gloomily as Jolly answered it.

'This is the Hon. Richard Rollison's residence,' said Jolly. 'I will see, Mr Grice. Will you speak to Superintendent Grice?' he added, covering the mouthpiece with his hand. Rollison nodded and took the receiver.

'Well, Bill,' said Rollison, heavily.

'Have you had any reports?' asked Grice.

'No bad ones,' said Rollison.

'Nor have I – yet,' said Grice. 'There are six reports of mild disorders among the revellers who were not examined.'

'Over-eating,' said Rollison severely.

'Could be. You've had the report from the nursing home, of course.'

'Yes.'

'Your aunts appear to have escaped,' said Grice, 'and I've spoken to Mrs Morral. She also is all right.'

'Katrina,' murmured Rollison, frowning. 'I think I might find out a little more about Katrina. Any news of the bearded man?'

'I can find out nothing about him,' said Grice. 'No one seems to have brought him to the party. And the man with the hooked nose was a stranger, too. I've neither name nor address of either of them, and they were missing when the loss was discovered.'

'I do remember that,' said Rollison. 'Three others were missing, weren't they?'

'All three were relatives whom your Aunt Gloria had invited,' Grice told him. 'One of them was Derek Morral. Apparently he stayed only for a few minutes, and went off when he saw that his wife was there. The other two were also relatives of yours.' There was a laughing note in Grice's voice. 'I don't think we need waste much time on such distinguished people, and I can't imagine that—'

Rollison said: 'Bill, no favouritism. Put 'em all on the list. I have a most uncomfortable feeling that this business has its roots in my benighted family, and that Glory can tell us more about it than she has yet admitted. I'm going to see her this morning.'

'Well, it can't do any harm,' said Grice moderately. 'Oh, there's one small thing, Rolly. The only two people who appear not to have eaten ice-cream were Katrina, Mrs Morral, and your Aunt Gloria.'

'Oh,' exclaimed Rollison, and added after a pause: 'And Jolly. He never eats ice-cream. And what of the bearded man and he of the hooked nose?'

'Florence Hardy remembers giving them some. She isn't the fool she seemed last night.'

'Well, that's a comfort,' said Rollison, 'I mean, about Florence not being a fool. All right, Bill, many thanks. I'm sorry I've pitch-forked you into this. Have you seen the *Daily Cry?'*

'I certainly have,' said Grice, grimly. *'And* the headline: *Who Tried to*

Murder the Toff?'

'Well, someone was bound to resurrect that soubriquet Nicknames stick.'

He thought he heard Grice chuckle as he rang off.

Rollison lit a cigarette, and turned thoughtfully to Jolly.

'Come and sit down, Jolly. Now, what do you really make of last night's show?'

'Very little indeed, sir, I'm afraid,' said Jolly, sitting down primly on the extreme edge of a chair. 'I have given the matter some thought, but I was aware of nothing at all unusual until the tube was found to be missing. I did not notice anyone showing particular interest in it, although I have tried to recall everyone who paid close attention to the souvenir wall. Comparatively few did, sir, because most of them had seen it before.' Jolly folded his hands across his stomach, and added miserably: 'I should have removed that tube. I feel responsible for it, sir.'

'Nonsense,' said Rollison crisply. 'The damn thing was put there on my instruction. There is some small satisfaction in learning that the whole lot seems to have been put into the ice-cream. The stuff has been analysed, and judging from the samples, most of it is still there. So it can't do harm elsewhere.'

'That is a very great relief,' murmured Jolly.

'The question is,' said Rollison, 'was arsenic put into the ice-cream deliberately, as some of the papers assume, or did the thief panic after the discovery, and get rid of it in what seemed the easiest way possible? Anyone standing near the kitchen could have dropped the tube in, and Miss Hardy was doling it out without looking, half the time.'

'I should not have allowed her to accept the responsibility for serving the ice-cream, even though she was most insistent,' said Jolly, remorsefully.

'Was she so insistent?' asked Rollison.

'Oh, very, sir.'

'I see,' said Rollison. 'Well, stop apportioning the blame and stop reproaching yourself. I am going to see my Aunt Gloria.'

'Shall I ring for an appointment, sir?'

'No,' said Rollison, 'I'd rather catch her unprepared.'

It was a little after ten o'clock when he left Gresham Terrace. An empty taxi passed him, but he did not hail it. He walked more briskly than of late, and now there was nothing aimless about him. It was undoubtedly true that he felt very much more himself than he had for many months – six months, as Old Glory would probably emphasise.

The same three elderly ladies were sitting at the window as before; the same middle-aged woman met him in the hall and wanted to know whether he had an appointment. The only thing different from the morning of his first call was that the young maid did not appear almost immediately afterwards. He glanced idly through a magazine on the hall table, feeling uneasy about the delay.

The middle-aged woman reappeared at last, to say that Lady Gloria was not in her room.

‘Have you looked inside?’

‘No, sir, the door is locked.’

‘Take me upstairs, please,’ said Rollison abruptly.

His manner was sharp and over-ruled the woman’s hesitation, and without another word said she led him to his aunt’s room. Rollison tried the handle of the door, then knocked loudly.

‘Are you all right, Aunt Gloria?’

There was no reply.

He knocked again, and the woman protested: *‘Please,* sir, not so much noise.’

Rollison said: ‘Is there a master key?’

‘Not this room, sir.’

‘When was Lady Gloria last seen?’ asked Rollison, taking a penknife from his hip pocket, and selecting a thin blade.

‘Last evening, sir, before she left to visit you.’

‘Do you mean she hasn’t come back?’ exclaimed Rollison.

Now the woman was really agitated.

‘She left instructions that the front door was not to be bolted, sir, as she might be back late. We have no staff on duty after eleven o’clock. No one heard her return, but I assumed— Mr Rollison! What are you doing?’

‘Unlocking the door,’ said Rollison grimly.

The woman stood by, protesting vainly as he inserted the thin blade into the keyhole. It was not a difficult lock to turn. In less than thirty seconds it clicked back and Rollison opened the door.

He stepped inside.

The room was in perfect order, and even the gloom of the morning did not detract from its charm. The divan bed was made, and the bedspread and eiderdown were unwrinkled. Rollison took these facts in, and then asked: ‘Who makes the bed?’

‘The chambermaid, sir.’

‘And she hasn’t been in here this morning?’

‘No,’ said the woman. She looked round distractedly. ‘I do hope that nothing is wrong, sir. I’ve never known Lady Gloria stay away for a night without first advising us, not all the time she has been here.’

‘Send for the chambermaid, please,’ said Rollison, crisply, ‘and make inquiries about last night. Someone would have heard Lady Gloria come in, if she was late,’

‘Not necessarily, sir, because—’

‘Please do what I say,’ said Rollison.

He went to the telephone on the writing table as the woman hurried out, and dialled Whitehall 1212. He was soon speaking to Grice.

‘Bill, have you seen Lady Gloria this morning? Or heard from her?’

‘No need,’ said Grice cheerfully. ‘She doesn’t eat ice-cream.’

‘When did you last see her?’

‘Last night. At your flat. Why, what’s the trouble?’

‘She didn’t return home,’ said Rollison. ‘See what you can find out, will

you?'

He rang off as the chambermaid came into the room. The girl, however, could only confirm what the older woman had already said.

Several pleasantly excited, elderly ladies came in. They slept in rooms on that passage, they said, but none of them had heard Gloria return. One declared that she had not slept until five o'clock, she *never* slept during the night, only during the early morning; and she was quite sure that she would have heard any sound in the passage.

Then into the room came a tall, handsome woman dressed severely in blue, a woman with grace of carriage and charm of manner. She also looked extremely capable.

Introducing herself as the manageress, she led Rollison to her office.

Two or three people whom they met on the way murmured: *'Good morning, Miss Page.'* But though she inclined her head graciously and answered each of them, Rollison felt sure that her mind was elsewhere and that she was greatly preoccupied.

Her office was pleasantly furnished, tidy and businesslike. A young typist was sitting at a desk, and Miss Page addressed her briskly.

'Go and collect the breakfast dockets, Alice, and come back in half-an-hour.'

The girl hurried out, with a sidelong glance at Rollison. Miss Page indicated an armchair, offered him a cigarette, and then looked at him severely.

'Do you realise that you have created a great deal of disturbance in the club, Mr Rollison?'

'If I have, I'm sorry,' said Rollison. 'Do *you* realise that Lady Gloria was at a party last night where many of the guests ate arsenic, and that, as she hasn't returned, there is the possibility that she may have been taken ill on the way here?'

Miss Page's poise and serenity of expression disappeared. She looked at him in growing consternation. After a pause she picked up a folded newspaper, and pointed to the headline.

'At *this* party?'

'Yes,' said Rollison, 'a somewhat highly-coloured description. But true enough to show the seriousness of my aunt's disappearance. The police are looking for her, and apparently no one here can give us any help towards finding out what became of her. You may be able to help in other ways. Had my aunt received many visitors lately, do you know?'

'She has more visitors than most of our resident members,' said Miss Page, now more composed. She moved to a filing-cabinet, extracted a manilla folder full of papers, turned the papers over and at last selected one and brought it to the desk.

'There have been no new visitors for Lady Gloria except you yourself – ten days ago – and a Mrs Morral,' she said, studying the papers.

Rollison said: 'Katrina Morral?'

'So I understand,' said Miss Page. She looked at him steadily. 'She has

been here five times within the last month. Of course, on other occasions she may have come with Lady Gloria. We keep records only of callers who come without a member to accompany them.'

'I see,' said Rollison, and added slowly: 'You keep very thorough records, don't you?'

'Since there was a burglary here, eight months ago, we have considered it necessary,' said Miss Page. 'Is there any other way in which I can help you?'

'Are you sure Lady Gloria has had no other visitors?'

'Quite sure, unless, as I said, she brought any in with her,' repeated Miss Page. She took off her horn-rimmed spectacles, revealing remarkably clear and attractive eyes. 'Mr Rollison, I want you to answer me one question, please.'

'Yes?' asked Rollison.

'Have you any reason to think that Lady Gloria has been poisoned? I don't mean whether she might have eaten ice-cream with arsenic in it; I mean, do you think that anyone had or has the deliberate intention of murdering her?'

'No,' said Rollison, promptly.

'Are you quite sure?'

'Quite. It's a remarkable question,' said Rollison. 'What prompted you to ask it?'

Miss Page put on her spectacles, hesitated for a moment, and then picked up a pencil and began to scribble meaninglessly on a sheet of blotting paper.

She said at last: 'I believe that she has received threatening letters, Mr Rollison. Although she refused to take any serious notice of them, I think they did, in fact, worry her.'

Chapter Five

Search for Old Glory

The first letter, it appeared, had been received some months before. It had been mildly threatening in tone, and vague in its wording. Old Glory had opened it when several of her cronies had been in the lounge, read it out, laughed, and thrown it away. Later, others had been delivered, addressed in the same handwriting, and noticeable because the address was always written in red ink. After the first one, Old Glory had always taken them to her room, and several envelopes had been found in her wastepaper basket. Miss Page admitted that she herself had been worried. Twice she had broached the subject to Lady Gloria, but had received only evasive answers.

Rollison listened with increasing anxiety.

'When did the last letter arrive?'

'An envelope was discovered about a fortnight ago,' said Miss Page. 'Wait just a moment, please.' She went to the cabinet again, took out another folder and brought it to the desk. There were three envelopes, all crumpled as if they had been screwed up and thrown away and afterwards retrieved and straightened out. The handwriting was the same in each case; it sloped backwards, was small and very easy to read.

The postmark of one was London, W1; of another, London, SW6; and of the third, Reading, Berkshire.

'And only the envelopes were recovered?' asked Rollison.

'Yes. There was never any trace of the letters. It was Lady Gloria's practice to burn correspondence once she had finished with it, so she probably burned the letters also. Presumably the envelopes seemed unimportant to her. Do they to you, Mr Rollison?'

'No,' said Rollison. 'I should like to take them with me.'

Miss Page looked doubtful.

'I think I would like to keep one,' she said, 'and then if you will give me a receipt, I will let you have the others.'

'That's fair enough,' agreed Rollison.

He left the club soon afterwards, greatly impressed by Miss Page's efficiency and a little puzzled by it. There was nothing remarkable in keeping the envelopes; but it was surprising to find a record was kept of all visitors, a system which went far beyond the normal club practices. All of these things, however, were subsidiary to the disappearance of Old Glory. He tried to minimise its possible seriousness, but at heart he was deeply worried. He felt, too, a little angry with her; if she had confided in him about the mysterious letters, he would have taken up the matter with great zest, yet, with such a stimulus ready to hand, she had chosen the artificiality of the party.

Why had she kept the letters to herself?

He went to see Grice, and after he had explained fully what had happened at the Marigold Club, Grice put the same question in a different way.

'Aren't you surprised that she didn't tell you anything about these letters, Rolly?'

Rollison said: 'Yes and no. She might have kept them to herself if she were sure that it was a family matter which she did not want to go any further.'

'But surely she would have trusted *you,'* protested Grice.

'We're an odd family,' said Rollison, 'and I wouldn't like to predict what any member of it would do in any given circumstances. Still, normally I should have expected Old Glory to tell me about family pothers. There's one other possible explanation of her reticence: she might have reasoned that I would think she was deliberately trying to pep me up. I appear to have been a pretty dull dog in recent months.'

Grice said diplomatically: 'Well, you appear to have snapped out of it now.'

Rollison shrugged. 'Enough to be interested in hearing what, if anything, you have discovered this morning.'

He already knew that none of the police inquiries at London hospitals had brought any news of Old Glory. Nor was there any fresh news about the victims of the ice-cream poisoning. Certainly there was no indication that anyone was seriously ill as a result of it. The worst sufferer appeared to be Florence Hardy, but she was now on the mend, and would be out of hospital in a few days.

The analyst's report on the ice-cream had been received, and had been checked against the amount of arsenic which Rollison knew the tube had contained. Only about one tenth of the amount was unaccounted for, and it was reasonable to assume that this had been disposed of in the portions of ice-cream that had been eaten. There was no need to fear that anyone still had the arsenic available for use. Grice again reminded Rollison that his aunt had declared that she had not touched the ice-cream, so there was no reason to believe that she had been taken ill with arsenical poisoning on the way from the flat.

Rollison showed Grice the envelopes, and they took them to Eddie Day, the Yard's expert on handwriting and forgery. Eddie Day was a plump man with protruding teeth and a Cockney accent, which he tried in vain to subdue. He was a conscientious man, with a genuine love for and pride in his work. He kept one of the envelopes for examination, while they took the other to the fingerprint testing department.

It transpired that there were only faint traces of fingerprints.

'We won't get much from them,' said the melancholy expert, glumly. 'Still, I'll try. Like me to take it along to records, Mr Grice?'

'Later will do,' said Grice. 'I'll have it photographed.'

'And then I'd like to have it back,' said Rollison.

'Why?' asked Grice.

Rollison grinned. ‘As a souvenir!’

He took the one envelope away with him when he left Scotland Yard a little before one o’clock. He was not feeling hungry, and he decided to pay another call before luncheon. Derek Morral had a flat in Green Street.

He had never visited Derek’s flat before. It was in Number 25a, a tall house in a terrace, somewhat dingy from the outside, but surprisingly bright and airy within. A card in a wall rack, bearing his cousin’s name, indicated that he inhabited Flat Number 6.

There was a lift, with the doors standing open. Rollison stepped in, closed the doors, and pressed the third floor button. Nothing happened. He pressed again, but the mechanism did not work.

With a resigned shrug of his shoulders, he pulled at the doors. *They would not open.*

He stood back, suddenly conscious that it was a very small lift. The only light came through frosted glass windows. He waited for a few moments before trying the doors again; he could not move them. He tried for a third time, exerting all his strength but failing to make any impression. His lips were set in a mirthless smile as he gave it up, and then pressed a first floor button; nothing happened at all.

‘Well, well!’ he muttered under his breath. ‘Is it a coincidence, I wonder? Or did I walk into a trap?’ He thought of shouting, but was reluctant to draw attention to himself just yet. It might be some mechanical fault which would right itself or be righted very soon. He tried the doors again, but it was no good, and he began to hum to himself as he sat down on a small, folding seat, fastened to the wall.

Had he been followed here, and had the lift mechanism been interfered with to prevent him from going upstairs? Was he being absurd even to contemplate such a possibility?

A harsh ringing sound startled him, and it hardly stopped before he heard footsteps, and a woman’s voice,

‘Oh, bother, the lift’s upstairs.’

‘We can walk,’ said a man.

‘Loaded up like *this?’* protested the woman, and he heard her take a step forward. The bell rang again, and sounded very near him. He looked up to the ceiling, and saw that it was a battery set in the lift itself.

There was a brief pause before the man said testily: ‘They’ve left the door open, I expect. It won’t come down. We may as well walk.’

‘I am not *going* to walk,’ said the woman, petulantly, and the bell rang again. It had hardly stopped before it started off a fourth time, and the woman spoke again. ‘Is someone else ringing?’

‘It sounds like it,’ said the man.

‘The door must be stuck. Darling, *do* try again. ‘

‘I don’t think that will help,’ called Rollison.

There was a startled silence, and then the man’s voice spoke.

‘Someone’s locked in, the damned thing’s gone wrong again.’ The voice rose. ‘Hallo, there! Can’t you get out?’

'No,' said Rollison.

'Oh, lord,' said the man, with a certain melancholy relish. 'Then you're in for a miserable time, I'm afraid. It jammed yesterday, and it was two hours before we could get it open.'

'Two *hours!'*

'I'm sorry, but there it is,' said the man. 'I'll hop along to the next block, where there's an attendant who's a bit of a mechanic. Chin up!' He lowered his voice. 'So you'll have to carry them up,' he told his wife, 'or else leave them to me. I'm going to see if I can get this chap out.'

Footsteps rang on the hard floor, and then there was silence.

Rollison shifted uncomfortably.

He was not convinced that his imprisonment had been accidental, although that now seemed a reasonable assumption. He thought gloomily of the discomfort of staying here for any length of time, but was more concerned lest he had been deliberately trapped; the difficulty was to think of a reason for such a trick.

After ten minutes, he heard a woman's voice. At first he paid it little attention, but when the woman drew nearer, he stiffened, for he thought she said something that sounded like 'Aunt Gloria'.

Footsteps drew nearer. Rollison listened intently. The woman's voice was low-pitched, and he thought she spoke with a foreign accent. She did not mention a name again until she was almost opposite the lift. Then she said: 'But what am I to do, if Derek will behave like this?'

'Make him see reason,' said Aunt Gloria, in her familiar deep voice. 'He isn't a fool, Katrina—'

'Glory!' cried Rollison, his voice filled with equal parts of relief and rage.

The footsteps stopped, and Katrina said in a startled voice: 'What was that?'

'Someone called out,' said Lady Gloria, composedly. 'I think it was Richard. Did you call, Richard?' Her voice was very severe, making her sound like Aunt Mattie in a particularly unpleasant mood.

'Yes, my dear Aunt,' said Rollison, ironically, 'I called out. I am locked in the lift. I came here to see Derek, because I thought he might know where you were.'

'I am here,' said Lady Gloria with great dignity and reasonableness.

'So simple,' said Rollison with studied calm. 'Then perhaps you will be surprised to learn that the police are searching London for you, and inquiries have been made at all nearby hospitals. Why, my dearest aunt, did you stay away from the club last night?'

'What do you mean, you're *locked* in?' demanded Lady Gloria sharply, splendidly disregarding what she preferred not to hear. 'Can't you get out?'

'No. A kindly man has gone to find a bit of a mechanic,' observed Rollison. 'He said it should not be more than two hours, and I have been here for a quarter-of-an-hour already. Tea through a hosepipe will probably be enough to keep me alive.'

'Don't be a silly,' said Lady Gloria, 'you can't stay in here. Do you know

how this lift works, Katrina?'

There was silence.

'Katrina!' exclaimed Lady Gloria, and then Rollison heard her gasp. There followed a minute of silence in which Rollison waited tensely, until his aunt said: 'What on earth possessed her to run away like that? I—oh,' she added, and Rollison could only just hear the last words. *'That's* why.'

A man's footsteps sounded in the passage, and stopped abruptly.

Chapter Six

Derek and Old Glory

Rollison could picture the scene. Lady Gloria, angry at Katrina's sudden departure and already ruffled by the situation, and Derek Morral walking into the hall, a stocky, powerful and good-looking man. Derek had doubtless stopped abruptly at the sight of Lady Gloria, uncertain whether to go back or go on.

'Derek,' said Old Glory, 'can you operate this lift? Your Cousin Richard is shut in there.'

'Who? *Rolly?'* Derek gave a short laugh. 'That'll teach him.'

'Maybe,' said Lady Gloria patiently, 'but can you open the doors?'

'I doubt it, if they're jammed,' said Derek, and there followed another futile effort to get them open. 'This has happened three times in a week, those engineers aren't worth a tinker's curse. What is Rolly doing here?'

'Presumably he came to see you,' said Old Glory, grimly.

Derek gave a hoot of pure amusement, which he curbed abruptly.

'Are you comfortable, Rolly?'

'I'm glad someone has a little human understanding,' said Rollison plaintively. 'I'm reasonably comfortable, thank you, but you can hardly expect me to be cock-a-hoop.'

'I don't think—' began Derek, and stopped in the middle of a sentence. 'Just a moment,' he said, and hurried off. There was a faint click. 'The light's not working,' he declared. 'It looks as if someone's switched the current off. Half a mo'.'

He hurried off, and was back within five minutes, pulling at the doors. They opened without any trouble.

'I expect that's what happened before but the liftman wouldn't admit that it had taken him two hours to find out that it was switched off at the main,' he said. 'How long have you been there?'

'Long enough to want a drink,' said Rollison.

'I can give you one,' said Derek, hospitably. 'We may as well go up in the lift, as it's working now. You're coming up, Aunt Gloria, aren't you?'

'No,' said Old Glory.

'Of course you are,' said Rollison, firmly.

It took a great deal of courage to outstare Lady Gloria; and some time, too. Derek stood aside, watching them, the corners of his mouth twitching. The house was quiet, but a rumble of traffic floated in at the door. Footsteps passed to and fro, and a horse-drawn van lumbered past. During this time, neither Lady Gloria nor Rollison looked away from each other, but at last Lady Gloria said sharply: 'Very well, Richard.'

'That's much better,' said Rollison, relaxing.

There was only just room for the three of them in the lift, but there was

no hitch this time. It stopped at the third floor, and Lady Gloria got out first. Rollison would not have been surprised had she decided to change her mind, and gone down the stairs, but she stood quite still as Derek inserted the key into the flat door. While he was opening it, Old Glory gripped Rollison's arm tightly, and whispered quickly: 'Don't mention his wife.'

Rollison said nothing.

'What's that?' asked Derek.

'What's what?' said Old Glory, innocently.

Derek's lips were curved a little, as if he not only knew that she had spoken, but also what she had said.

He led the way into a small hall, the walls of which were covered with trophies of the spear and wild animal skin variety. Derek threw open another door. They stepped into a sitting-room furnished with a surprising variety of carved tables fashioned of exquisite woods; Arabian silver, Chinese lacquer, and rich, very beautiful Oriental carpets, some of which hung from the walls.

The room, however, had a desolate, uncared for air. There was dust on most of the tables, and the ash trays were overflowing.

'Welcome,' said Derek, ironically.

'Thanks,' said Rollison.

'Why do you want to see me, Richard?' demanded Lady Gloria. 'I have an appointment at two o'clock, and I must not be late for it. I hope you do not intend to take up too much of my time.'

'Oh, no,' said Rollison, drily. 'I want to telephone Scotland Yard and tell them that you are safe, that's all. May I use it, Derek?' He indicated a telephone, noticing that there were fingerprints on the dust which covered it.

'Yes, of course.'

The others were watching him closely as he lifted the receiver, and he got the impression that both were a little apprehensive of what he was about to say. He smiled at them, each in turn, and waited for Grice to come on the line. As he waited, Rollison tried to analyse his own thoughts, and to make a guess at the emotions which the others were feeling. He judged that there was some restraint between them, and that Katrina was the cause. He spent more time watching Derek than Aunt Gloria; he felt that he knew most of what there was to know about her, but he could certainly not say the same of his cousin.

Derek was a curious individual in many ways.

Standing and watching, with a half-smile on his face, he seemed a strong personality, the kind of man whom it was difficult to forget. Yet he, Rollison, had forgotten him. What was it about Derek that made it so difficult to tabulate and assess him? A certain elusiveness, perhaps, an extreme reticence?

'Hallo, Rolly,' said Grice, at last.

'Hallo, old chap,' said Rollison. 'I've news for you. You can call the bloodhounds off. My Aunt Gloria has surfaced. She's with me now!'

‘Where has she been?’ asked Grice, sharply.

‘I don’t know. I do know that she’s sound in wind and limb and very anxious to keep an appointment with—who did you say, Aunt Gloria?’

‘I did not say,’ said Lady Gloria, blandly.

‘With an unknown person,’ completed Rollison. ‘I’m speaking from 25a Green Street – yes, my cousin’s flat. And there’s really no need to worry about my aunt. You do understand that, don’t you? … What’s that?’

Grice said: ‘I asked you whether you were asking me to send someone to follow her.’

‘Of course I am,’ said Rollison, patiently. ‘How long do you think it will take?’

‘About ten minutes.’

‘Oh, I can manage that,’ said Rollison. ‘Any other news?’

As he spoke, he could hear Grice speaking into another mouthpiece, and he knew that in a very few minutes a reliable man would leave Scotland Yard, wait for Lady Gloria as she left the flat, and follow her wherever she went; he was determined to make sure that she did not get lost again. Grice understood his difficulties, and kept him talking; it was at least five minutes before Rollison replaced the receiver. Then he put both hands in his trousers pockets and regarded his aunt with a forbidding frown.

‘The police are not pleased with you,’ he said.

‘I am not interested in the pleasures of the police force,’ said Lady Gloria. ‘And there is no need for you to put on that melodramatic scowl. It leaves me quite unmoved. Any arrangements which I choose to make are entirely my affair.’

‘You astound me,’ exclaimed Rollison. ‘Fifty policemen have been looking for you since eleven o’clock this morning, because we were afraid you might be lying by the roadside, a victim of arsenical poisoning, but it’s no business of theirs. Impertinent rascals! No business of mine, either. But I’ll make it mine, I think. Where did you go?’

‘I do not like your manner, Richard,’ said Lady Gloria.

Rollison laughed: ‘But you helped to bring me back to the happy norm, so you are partly to blame. You ought to mark it up – in red, for preference.’

‘I don’t know what—’ began Lady Gloria, only to stop abruptly.

She had the quickest mind of any woman of Rollison’s acquaintance, and he saw that she had realised at once that he was referring to the envelopes which had been addressed to her in red ink. She opened her lips again, as if to make some comment, then closed them firmly and looked at her watch.

‘I am going,’ she said.

‘Will you have dinner with me tonight?’ asked Rollison. ‘And show that all is forgiven?’

‘No.’

‘Don’t say you’ve an engagement for dinner, too,’ said Rollison.

‘Is another engagement necessary before one can refuse an invitation from you?’ she asked coldly.

Lady Gloria said goodbye to Derek, then turned rather pointedly away

from him and Rollison. She insisted on walking down the stairs, refusing to allow either of them to accompany her.

Rollison stayed at the window, until he had seen a plainclothes policeman walking along the other side of the street. He smiled with satisfaction.

'Well, what *is* this all about?' Derek asked.

Rollison mixed himself a drink, and waited for Derek to do the same. Then he lifted his glass.

'Here's to Old Glory, bless her heart!'

'She's all right,' said Derek, almost grudgingly, 'but she's far too interested in my affairs.'

'She's too interested in everyone's affairs,' said Rollison. 'She was the real cause of the party last night.'

'Do you know why she wanted it?' asked Derek, in no way surprised.

'No,' said Rollison, but that was not true; he could guess the real reason behind Old Glory's anxiety to force the party upon him; so far she had told him only part of the truth.

'Well, I know what it was,' said Derek. 'She imagined she could mend matters between Katrina and me.'

'Oh,' said Rollison, blankly. 'Trouble? I am sorry.'

Derek frowned, bringing his dark eyebrows close together.

'Don't pretend you don't know.'

'I had no idea at all until the party night,' said Rollison, truthfully, 'and then I heard only a murmur from Aunt Mattie. It's impossible to believe what she tells you. A ten-minute tiff would be a life-wrecking quarrel to her.' He proffered cigarettes, but Derek waved them away, saying that he always smoked a pipe.

'Always?' asked Rollison, casually.

'Yes.' Derek did not see Rollison's glance towards the cigarette ash.

'If you hadn't been locked in, you'd have had to wait for me,' Derek went on. 'I've been out since early morning.'

'Has Katrina been in?' asked Rollison.

Derek said sharply: 'She no longer lives here.'

'Oh,' said Rollison. 'Sorry.'

If neither Katrina nor Derek had smoked cigarettes in the flat, who had? Rollison found it easy to understand, now, why he had been shut in the lift. Some unauthorised person had been in the flat, and a third party, watching below, had seen him arrive and acted quickly to delay him. Derek appeared to suspect nothing.

'Old Glory has many good points,' Rollison went on, 'but I wish she wouldn't interfere. She thought I was under the weather and made her effort through me, taking the occasion as an excuse, you know.' He was smiling, as if secretly amused, for he was trying to manoeuvre Derek into confiding in him. He did not think it would be easy, for Derek was notoriously a secretive individual where his private affairs were concerned. He had already snapped at mention of Katrina.

'Were you under the weather?' Derek asked.

Rollison finished his drink and put his glass down with a bang.

'Yes,' he said. 'I was making a fool of myself. Haven't you heard about that? I thought it was a family legend by now.'

Derek said awkwardly: 'I did hear a rumour about someone who lost her memory—'

'I thought something would have reached you,' said Rollison, a little defiantly. 'For a family whose members ignore one another for three hundred and sixty-four days in the year, we're surprisingly well-supplied with information about one another. Though you and I are on the outer fringes, of course. Most of them avoid me as they would the plague.'

'Well, you have been somewhat in the public eye,' said Derek, beginning to react as Rollison hoped he would.

'There have been things to do and I have done them,' said Rollison, leaning back and nursing his knees. 'The family disapproved – so what? Reflections tell me that most of the family isn't worth a tinker's curse, though there *are* bright exceptions.' He looked up with a sudden grin. 'Have you been among the many who have disapproved of me?'

Derek said slowly: 'Well, I haven't exactly disapproved. I couldn't see what took you down into the East End so much, but I had a sneaking admiration for—'

'Oh, lord! Cut that out!'

'Well, it's true,' said Derek, and added with a flicker of amusement: 'It must be the eternal boy in me. Of course, I haven't been in England much.'

'Foreign service has its drawbacks,' said Rollison.

'I prefer being abroad,' said Derek, quickly. 'I'm waiting to be posted again. I can't stand this climate, I never could. Mind you, I like being here for a month or two, and while I'm away I'm always hankering after a good old English downpour, but—' He broke off, spread his hands out towards an imaginary fire, and sat down in the easy chair. He leaned forward, looking into the fireplace, and was silent for some minutes. Rollison did not disturb him. He now felt reasonably certain that the story would soon be told, and in his mind Katrina's words to Old Glory were running with surprising vividness. *'But what am I to do if Derek will behave like this?'* And Old Glory had replied: *'Make him see reason.'*

So they blamed Derek for whatever had happened.

Derek said abruptly: 'I don't see why I should unburden myself to you, Rolly, you've got more than enough on your mind as it is, but I feel so infernally alone here. Most of the family look on me as the freak from wildest Borneo, and when I brought Katrina back, that was the last straw.' His eyes were narrowed, but Rollison thought that they were filled with pain. 'That wouldn't have mattered a damn had things gone on all right.'

Rollison made a sympathetic murmur.

'I don't understand it,' Derek said, fiercely, 'it's quite beyond me. Katrina, of all people—'

Rollison said nothing.

Derek went on: 'Of course, no one else has an inkling. As far as they

know, I've cooled off Katrina. That's why Old Glory is championing her. Old Glory probably thinks that my travelling has affected my head, but—damn it, Rolly, what else *could* I do? What would you do if your wife went off one morning without saying a word, stayed away three days, and then came back and wouldn't give any explanation?'

He expected some response, and Rollison murmured: 'That's difficult, isn't it?'

'Difficult! It was bad enough the first time. The second time we had a flaming row. The third time I told her she needn't come back. She didn't. It's finished. How she got in touch with Old Glory, I don't know.'

'She was with Old Glory this morning,' said Rollison. 'They came in from the street while I was locked in the lift.'

Derek started. *'Here?'*

'Yes.'

'I can't believe it!'

'Well, I didn't see her,' admitted Rollison, 'but I did hear her, and hers isn't a voice which one would easily forget. As soon as you came on the scene, she made off. You cut her last night, didn't you?'

'I didn't cut her,' said Derek, sharply. 'The moment I saw her I left, that's all. I don't think she saw me.'

'Oh,' said Rollison. 'That's difficult, of course. Haven't you any idea where she went on her visits?'

'None at all.'

'No evidence for suspecting—' Rollison paused, for this was dangerous ground.

Derek growled: 'I've suspected everything. As for evidence – well, she has been seen about with one or two men. I—er—I kept my eyes open,' he added, colouring slightly, 'and I had one or two inquiries made—'

'Could you be more precise?' asked Rollison, gently.

Derek's face went a darker shade.

'Well, I employed a detective agency.'

'What agency?'

'The Gordon Inquiry Bureau,' Derek told him. 'I know it all sounds rather childish, but—why, what's the matter?' He looked startled at Rollison's change of expression.

'The Gordon was a bad choice,' Rollison told him. 'It specialises in one thing, divorce, and it isn't very good. Still, you weren't to know that.'

'A friend recommended me,' said Derek. He stood up and stepped to the window, and Rollison could easily guess the state of his mind. He was so desperately in love with Katrina and so bitterly disappointed in her. 'Anyhow, I got one or two reports, and then I took the agency off the case,' growled Derek.

'Did you know the men concerned?' asked Rollison.

'Not personally. One was a good-looking, bearded fellow, named Lorne. The other was a smaller man, with a big nose. Gordon's said they couldn't find out who he was. I can't imagine either of them appealing to Katrina, but

she undoubtedly saw them both each time she went away. It's a pretty miserable story, isn't it? Go on, tell me that you think I'm a suspicious fool.'

Rollison said: 'I think you've behaved pretty well, old chap, and that's not blarney. Extreme provocation and all that. But I can't help feeling that if you had employed someone other than the Gordon Agency, you might not have taken quite so much for granted. You see, they can't think about anything but divorce and the situations leading to divorce. No matter what story you told them, they would assume you were looking for evidence.'

Derek said nothing.

'Now there is one odd thing,' declared Rollison, getting up and moving about the room. 'Lorne was at the party last night.'

'What?'

'So was the little man with the hooked nose,' said Rollison, 'and I do not believe they would have been there had the circumstances been what you imagine. There's much more in this than meets the eye. There is also the matter of the arsenic.'

'I read something about that in the papers,' said Derek, 'but I don't pay much attention to newspapers these days.'

'Who does?' asked Rollison, lightly.

'Well, what do *you* think is happening?' asked Derek.

He was standing with his back to the window and watching Rollison closely. Rollison was quite sure that new hope had sprung into his mind. There was an eagerness which Derek tried hard to repress, even a hint of excitement, as if he were clutching at a straw, convinced that it was something more solid.

'I'm not even going to guess,' said Rollison, 'but if it's all right with you, I am going to try to find out.'

Derek said: 'Look here, you won't make a lot of publicity for me about this, will you?'

'Not if it can be avoided,' said Rollison.

'Can't you promise better than that?'

'Not yet,' Rollison told him.

Derek demurred, but without much spirit, obviously he was glad and grateful to find Rollison interested.

Rollison would have gone into more detail had he not felt sure that Derek was completely obsessed by his own personal troubles. He would not be able to look at anything detachedly, and this situation needed a detached mind.

'Have you had lunch?' Derek asked, abruptly.

'No.'

'Neither have I. Let's go out.'

They went to a small restaurant nearby and lunched well. On parting, Derek's hand shot out in a vice-like grip as he muttered some incoherent words of thanks before walking rapidly away. Rollison watched him disappear, and then followed slowly in his wake. Derek turned into Green Street; so did another man, a rather shabby individual whose shoes wanted heeling. Derek entered the house, but the other man stayed outside, walking

rather aimlessly up and down, as if he were looking for a particular address and could not find it.

'Now that is curious,' Rollison murmured aloud.

Near the end of the road was a telephone kiosk, and he went to it and put a call through to his flat.

'This is the Hon. Richard Rollison's residence,' said Jolly, in a deep voice.

'Outside Mr Derek Morral's house at 25a Green Street,' said Rollison, 'there is a man of medium height, wearing a soiled grey suit, a bowler, and with down-at-heel shoes. I think he's following Mr Morral. Pick him up quickly, Jolly.'

'Very good, sir,' said Jolly, his voice a mixture of resignation and eagerness. 'I will leave at once.'

Jolly arrived, by taxi, at the corner of Green Street exactly a quarter-of-an-hour later. Rollison was still near the telephone kiosk, and the shabby man was still lurking near the houses. Rollison now had no doubt that he was there to watch Derek.

Jolly caught Rollison's eye, but made no sign. Rollison took a taxi, and went immediately to Scotland Yard.

The officials on duty recognised him, and he did not have to go through the formality of making out a form and having his name sent up to Grice. Two or three inspectors whom he knew stopped him in the passages, and made rather pointed remarks about his long period of absence. One suggested that the arsenic story was an imaginary one, designed to bring the Toff into the limelight again. To all these pleasantries Rollison returned an amiable smile, until at last he reached Grice's room. It was a large corner room, with two windows, and Grice had a huge flat-topped desk, kept in scrupulous order. At a lesser desk, set at a respectful distance, was an Inspector named Hill, who half-rose from his seat and then dropped down again.

Grice got up and pushed a chair towards Rollison.

'Welcome to the returning stranger,' he said.

'Can we forget that crack?' asked Rollison, wearily. 'I *think* – I can't go further than that yet – but I *think* we've a really puzzling job on our hands, Bill.'

'Good!'

'I don't know why my Aunt Gloria decided to stay away for the night, but I think she spent it with Katrina Morral,' Rollison went on. 'That's the best I can do about that one. However, there are others things of note …'

He repeated Derek's story, and Grice showed a quickening interest. At the mention of the name 'Lorne' he scribbled a line on a slip of paper and handed it to Hill, who immediately lifted the telephone and spoke in a low voice, so as not to interrupt Rollison. By the time the story was finished, Hill was looking round at Grice, who asked him: 'Do we know this man Lorne?'

'No,' said Hill, 'there's no such name on the records. Shall I telephone Gordon's?'

'I think I'd like to visit Gordon's myself,' said Rollison. 'No action – just a

mission of inquiry.'

'Well, I can't stop you,' said Grice. 'What do you really make of the situation, Rolly?'

Rollison said: 'I don't make anything of it yet. I only see a series of some peculiar facts. One, the unexplained jaunts of my cousin Katrina. Two, the fact that Derek is being watched. Three, the fact that two men with whom Katrina has been known to associate gate-crashed the party last night. Four, while they were there the arsenic was stolen and dropped into the ice-cream. Five, someone was in Derek's flat and steps were taken to keep me from going there too promptly.'

'What about Lady Gloria?'

'I think she started off by acting as a fairy godmother, and then found herself in deeper water than she realised,' said Rollison. 'I've been thinking over what I know of the Katrina-Derek marriage. He came back in January, and it's obvious that Katrina's behaviour began worrying him soon after that. It's reasonable to assume that Old Glory was quickly on the scene. She attempted to heal the breach. Her efforts were looked upon with disfavour by certain gentry, and she received threatening letters telling her to desist forthwith. That seems reasonable, doesn't it?'

'I suppose so,' said Grice, 'but it brings us to the question we've already asked ourselves; why didn't she tell you that there was trouble?'

Rollison shook his head.

'We haven't any answer to that one,' he said solemnly.

He left soon afterwards, and just before half-past three turned into a narrow street at the back of the Strand. The Gordon Inquiry Bureau was on the fourth floor of a depressingly drab building. The name on the frosted glass door-panel was peeling off, and the 'q' in *'Inquiries'* was missing. Someone was typing, at an indifferent speed. It proved to be a girl, with thin features and straight black hair, who pushed her chair back, when Rollison entered, with a protesting sigh.

After a certain amount of evasive by-play the head of the firm consented to appear.

He was a short, plump man, and he shook Rollison's hand a shade too warmly. It was a great pleasure, he said, to have such a distinguished visitor, he could not dare to assume that Mr Rollison had work for the Agency! He laughed.

'One can never tell,' said Rollison, gravely. 'Did you know that Mr Derek Morral was my cousin?'

'Mr *Morral!*' gasped Gordon. 'Well, well! No, I had no idea, Mr Rollison, but I am sure that I did my best for him, I took a personal interest in the case, I did really. I looked into it myself, I thought that Mr Morral was too distinguished a gentleman to leave the inquiries in the hands of my staff. I must admit – I say this with great deference – I must admit that Mr Moral did *not* give us all the co-operation which we might have expected, no indeed. Of course, I understand the difficulty of the situation, we are very discreet, yes, really very discreet, our reputation is extremely high. I do

hope that Mr Morral was satisfied?'

'Oh, perfectly,' said Rollison.

'Excellent, excellent!' breathed Gordon with evident relief.

'But I am not,' said Rollison.

Gordon gaped. 'My dear sir!'

'There was a little man with a hooked nose,' murmured Rollison, 'a man whom you saw with Mrs Morral, but whose name and address you weren't able to discover. There was also the address of one other man you forgot to give Mr Morral.'

'Oh, dear,' said Gordon, dabbing his forehead. 'I really thought I had made it clear that Mr Morral was not helpful, not helpful at all. When he took the case out of our hands, there was, naturally, nothing more we could do. We did not report *everything* which we discovered. He lost interest, so what more could you expect?'

'So you do know the addresses,' said Rollison.

'My dear sir! This is an efficient bureau,' declared Gordon, gathering the shreds of his importance round him. 'We cannot always undertake to get all information *immediately*. But we always get the information *eventually.'* He pulled open a drawer, ran through the folders it contained, and at last drew one out. More than a little grubby, it had obviously been used to file other cases besides that of Derek and Katrina Morral.

'Here it is,' he said, 'everything, everything that—why, look. Look, Mr Rollison! *Look!'*

There were only blank sheets of paper in the file.

Rollison looked not at the file but at Gordon, whose eyes were blinking nervously, and who was casting quick, sidelong glances towards the door.

'I can't understand it, I really can't,' he gasped, 'you see what has happened, Mr Rollison, the papers have been *stolen.* Stolen, yes, from this very office, I—excuse me please, excuse me. That girl!' he added, disparagingly. 'Such a difficult job with staff these days.'

He hurried out, but was back within five minutes. The girl had assured him that no one had been into his private office, the theft must have taken place at night. He was greatly alarmed in case other files had been disturbed. Mr Rollison must believe that this was a great shock to him. It would be disastrous if other papers, too, had been stolen. He shuffled through several files, found them intact, and made a convincing pretence that he was greatly relieved.

'Don't you remember the names and addresses?' asked Rollison, abruptly.

'My dear sir! With fifty or sixty cases going through the office at the same time, it is impossible to remember *names.* But I will try. Please be patient. I will try.' He sat back in his chair and thrust his chin on one hand and, presumably, concentrated all his energies on the effort of recollection. His lips moved: his eyes were closed. Every five seconds or so he uttered a groan, as of a great intellect *in extremis.* Then suddenly, explosively, he came to life.

'Lorne! Lorne, that is it! That was the name of one of the men. I recall it

now, I saw him myself, a handsome, dashing naval gentleman!'

'Naval?' asked Rollison sharply. 'Are you sure?'

'Well, well,' said Gordon, 'he had a beard, I remember that well, many naval gentlemen have beards. Of course, it is not conclusive, but I distinctly remember marking the file to make further inquiries, and then Mr Morral took the case out of our hands.' He leaned forward, impressively. 'I am really sorry, Mr Rollison, *deeply* sorry that I cannot be more helpful. You see how I have tried.'

'I hope you'll keep on trying,' said Rollison drily.

He believed very little of what Gordon had told him. His poor opinion of the man was confirmed, but he did not see what else he himself could usefully do just then. So he took his leave, accompanied to the door by Gordon, who shook hands with the same over-hearty emphasis and retired to his office.

The door closed.

There were footsteps on the stairs below. They stopped abruptly, then sounded again, going downwards, instead of coming up. Rollison reached the next landing, looked about him, and saw no one. He was puzzled; it seemed almost as if someone had seen him and turned back, taking refuge in one of the offices. So Rollison made a great show of hurrying down the next flight of steps, but did not go further. He waited, peering upwards, and caught a glimpse of a man crossing the landing above him, and hurrying up the stairs.

Rollison hesitated, pondering on his next course of action. Gordon's new visitor did not want to be seen, that was clear. If he returned to the office, he would be able to see the newcomer, and at the same time give him and Gordon a shock.

He decided to go back, and was halfway there when he heard an urgent whisper below him.

'*Mr Rollison – Mr Rollison!*'

He looked down, and saw Jolly standing at the foot of the stairs.

Chapter Seven

Tips Springs Surprises

Already reasonably certain of the identity of the man who had nipped up to Gordon's office, Rollison joined Jolly.

'Did you see him, sir?'

'No. Who was it?'

'The man who was watching Mr Morral.'

'Why isn't he watching Morral now?'

Jolly's shoulders lifted in a gesture of disparagement.

'Mr Morral left his flat about half-an-hour after you had gone, sir, and made his way towards Piccadilly. There, the man upstairs lost him. I do not think there is very much doubt he is a novice at the job, sir, for Mr Morral made no attempt to avoid him, and in my opinion was quite unaware that he was being followed. However, the man lost him and, as instructed, I followed the man. Have you any further instructions?'

'Wait down here,' said Rollison, 'and if he comes out before me, follow him again.'

'Very good, sir.'

Rollison could discern no sign of delight in Jolly, but he knew it was there. The party had certainly served its purpose, and Jolly did not greatly care who else suffered inconvenience or sickness, provided Rollison was 'cured'. Rollison left him with a wave of his hand, and returned to Gordon's office. The typewriter was still tapping its erratic way as before. Rollison opened the door quietly and stepped inside. He was almost in front of the girl before she noticed him. She jumped up with a stifled cry.

'Hush!' whispered Rollison, and placed a pound note in front of her. With a conspiratorial wink he walked towards the inner office. He could hear Gordon talking, and judging from the tone of the man's voice, Gordon was not pleased with his agent.

Rollison flung the door open.

'The last time,' Gordon was saying, hoarsely, 'absolutely the *last* time you work for me, you fool, you *utter* fool—'

Then he saw Rollison.

'Hallo,' said Rollison, amiably, 'here I am again.'

He had not had a great deal to do with Gordon in the past, and he rather expected the man to give way completely. He received an unpleasant surprise. Gordon closed his mouth and drew himself up with an odd kind of dignity, then gave a curt order to the shabby man to wait outside.

He said nothing more until the man had left the room, and then turned a frosty eye on Rollison.

'I must ask you, Mr Rollison, what is the meaning of this intrusion?'

Rollison said: 'Gordon, you're asking for trouble.'

‘Asking for trouble!’ gasped Gordon. *‘I!* I have a mind, yes, indeed, I have a mind to send for the police! You come here, you enter my office without knocking, without permission! It is outrageous. I received you courteously, I did all that I could for you, and you—’

‘You lied to me,’ said Rollison quietly. ‘Those papers were not stolen. You are working for Lorne. You have betrayed Mr Morral’s confidence.’

If Gordon felt any uneasiness, he hid it well.

He said sharply: ‘I have betrayed no confidence, Mr Rollison, and in fact I told you *only* what I believed you already knew. What do you mean by coming here and expecting me to give you confidential information? I must protect my clients, past and present. Mr Morral was a client of mine, and the only person to whom I will give information about his case is – *Mr Morral!’*

‘Or the police,’ said Rollison.

‘My records are open to inspection,’ said Gordon, loftily. ’You cannot frighten *me,* Mr Rollison.’

‘I wonder,’ murmured Rollison.

He admired the little man, in spite of his own annoyance and disappointment. Gordon was not going to give anything away. He was certainly not easily frightened, and would not submit to threats or bluster. Rollison stared at him for some time in complete silence, and had the satisfaction of noting that a nerve near his eye had begun to twitch and his lips were not quite steady.

‘Get out!’ screamed Gordon at last. ‘You have no right here, I will not divulge my clients’ secrets. I will not! Go away!’

‘Very well,’ said Rollison. He got up and walked to the door, then turned. ‘This is one of your greater mistakes.’

He walked easily down the stairs, carrying with him a picture of Gordon’s lips, puckered and unsteady.

Jolly was waiting.

‘Let the first man go, and follow Gordon if he leaves,’ said Rollison. ‘Does he know you?’

‘I don’t think so, sir,’ said Jolly, ‘but I will try to avoid being seen by him, that will be the best course. Have you any idea where he might go?’

‘To see a man he calls a naval gentleman,’ said Rollison.

He left Jolly outside the building, and walked towards the Strand, feeling very satisfied with himself. Gordon’s fear had obviously been caused by anxiety lest he should lose his licence; that was the guiding fear of all private detectives who took risks. It seemed obvious, now, that someone – probably Lorne – had discovered that Derek had employed Gordon’s Agency to watch Katrina, and had approached Gordon and paid him (a) to give Derek only part of the story, and (b) to have Derek watched.

Why should he need to have Derek watched?

It was nearly half-past four, and Rollison took a taxi to the Marigold Club, where Old Glory would give him tea, if she were in, and might perhaps talk more freely than she had yet done. He was disappointed, however, for his aunt had gone out a little after four o’clock. Rollison thought that the

middle-aged woman who gave him the information was more aloof than on his earlier visits, and deduced from that, that his reputation was not good at the Marigold Club. He was smiling at the thought as he made his way towards Gresham Terrace, but quickly forgot it when he saw a familiar figure standing in the street.

It was 'Tips'.

Beyond the fact that Mary had brought Tips along the previous night, he knew nothing of him. He had been amused at Tips' frankness in telling Mary that she had asked for trouble, but he had given him little thought since then. Rollison noticed that he was a little more than medium height, well-dressed and remarkably attractive.

'Hallo,' he said, as Rollison drew up.

'Hallo,' said Rollison. 'Are you waiting for me?'

'Well, yes, I was, actually.'

'Come in,' said Rollison, 'and have a cup of tea.'

'Thanks,' said Tips.

'You'd better come into the kitchen,' Rollison said. 'Jolly's out, and I'll have to make the tea.'

Tips followed Rollison into the kitchen, and leaned against the draining-board, with one hand in his pocket and the other playing with his tie. He looked dreadfully earnest. Only the young could look so solemn, Rollison thought, as he put the kettle on, and took biscuits and cake from the larder.

'Rollison,' said Tips, as if he had been screwing up his courage to speak. 'How well do you know Mary Henderson?'

'Not very well,' said Rollison.

'Was she invited here last night?'

Rollison said: 'I don't know, I didn't make the list myself, but I expect so.'

'Why?' demanded Tips.

'That's hard to say,' said Rollison, 'except that she was once involved in a spot of trouble, and I managed to help her out of it. Actually her brother was in the trouble, and she was little more than a girl at the time.'

'She's little more than a girl, now,' said Tips. 'I see. Was it all right for her to bring me along?'

'Great Scott, yes!'

'Thanks,' said Tips, gratefully. 'I felt odd man out. Don't like putting my nose in where I'm not wanted. Bad form. Fact is – I'm worried.'

'About Mary?'

'Yes. That powder. Arsenic. She took it, you know.'

He made that remarkable statement without any change of expression. Only a slight embarrassment could be inferred as Rollison stared at him in genuine astonishment.

'Do you know what you're saying?' Rollison asked, at last.

Tips nodded.

'Would have told you last night, but for that policeman. Hoped Mary would admit to it. Tried to make her. She wouldn't. Left this morning after a flaming row,' added Tips, and there was the faintest of smiles in his eyes.

‘Look out!’ he added, and as he spoke the kettle boiled over. It splashed Rollison’s hand, and he shook his fingers vigorously. Tips leaned forward and lifted the kettle off the boiling ring. ‘Hurt?’ he asked.

‘No, thanks,’ said Rollison. ‘I think I’d better concentrate.’ He said nothing more until they were comfortably ensconced with a tray in the sitting-room. Then, handing Tips a cup of tea he said easily: ‘So you think Mary took the tube of arsenic, and you’ve told her you think so?’

‘That’s right,’ said Tips.

‘Was that wise?’

‘I think so,’ said Tips. ‘No knowing where a thing like that will get you. Took it for a joke, of course. I saw her. Then she put it behind a vase of flowers. When I went to get it, it wasn’t there.’

‘And you didn’t think any of this was worth telling me last night?’ asked Rollison. ‘You could have called me aside, the police need not have heard.’

‘Didn’t know enough about you,’ declared Tips. ‘Been making inquiries. Know you’re reliable, now. Didn’t, last night. Sorry.’

‘Oh, that’s all right,’ said Rollison, faintly.

‘Thanks,’ said Tips. ‘Fact is, I’ve only just got back from South Africa. RAF. Met Mary Henderson out there. Met her again here, at a club. She was WAAF, you know.’

‘Yes, I knew,’ said Rollison.

‘She had a date,’ said Tips. ‘Very important, but then everything’s important with Mary. Madly keen on this date, then she got your invitation. Cooled off the other and started to get excited about yours. Insisted on bringing me. Told me a lot about you I didn’t believe – then.’

‘Who’s your informant?’ asked Rollison.

‘Newspaper Johnny, ex-RAF,’ said Tips. ‘Quite reliable. Well, there are the facts. Mary took that stuff, but most emphatically didn’t put it in the ice-cream.’

‘Can you be sure of that?’ asked Rollison.

‘Quite sure,’ said Tips. ‘Kept my eye on her the whole time. Meant to retrieve the stuff myself, but didn’t have a chance.’

‘And you don’t know who took it?’

‘Not a clue. Well, thanks for the tea. I must be going.’

‘You know that I may have to tell the police about this, don’t you?’ asked Rollison. ‘Several people are ill from the poisoning, and the inquiry will have to be a thorough one.’

‘Leave it to you,’ said Tips, generously.

‘Mary will know where the story came from,’ said Rollison.

‘Can’t be helped,’ said Tips. ‘May do her good. She is too selfish by half. Told her so,’ he added, and again there was the hint of a smile. ‘Between you and me, I haven’t much time for Mary. Nice-looking girl, but possessive.’ He stood up, and smoothed his hair down. ‘If I can help at all, let me know.’

‘I will,’ said Rollison, ‘if you will give me your name and address.’

‘Oh, glad to. Andrew Tippets, hence Tips. Home address, 5 May Street,

Oxford. London address, RAF Club, Piccadilly. Got that?'

'Yes, thanks,' said Rollison.

Tips went off, brisk and alert and very self-possessed, while Rollison, deeply intrigued, watched him from the window. Tips looked neither right nor left, as far as he could see, but suddenly for no apparent reason, he crossed the road. It was a foolish thing to do at that moment, for a car was passing: it had to swerve to miss him. Tips did not appear to notice it, but reached the opposite pavement and stood waiting. Rollison opened the window to get a better view, and as he did so another man came in sight. The newcomer was tall and remarkably good-looking, and he had a yellow beard.

Rollison held his breath.

Below him, Tips clenched his right hand, drew it back and then drove it powerfully into the bearded face. Lorne was taken completely by surprise. He fell to the ground, and Tips walked past him without once glancing behind.

Chapter Eight

Lorne

Two or three people in the street saw the incident, and one of them ran after Tips, while two hurried to Lorne, and began to help him up. Tips shouldered his man off and, still without looking round, turned the comer.

Voices floated up, but Rollison could not hear what was said. He closed the window, so that he could not easily be seen, and watched the street. After some time, Lorne managed to persuade his sympathisers that he was not seriously hurt, and presumably he also persuaded them that he was not going to take any action. They seemed disappointed, but let him go his way.

Rollison was halfway down the stairs when he heard footsteps in the front hall and, looking over the bannisters, saw that Lorne was entering the building. Rollison immediately nipped back to the flat and waited for the bell to ring.

Opening the door, after a studied delay, Rollison noted that the damage to Lorne's face was not as great as he had supposed.

In a mellow, pleasing voice Lorne wished him good evening, obviously unaware that Rollison had witnessed the incident.

'You are Mr Rollison, aren't you?'

'Yes,' said Rollison.

'My name is Lorne, Cedric Lorne,' said the other. 'Can you spare me a few minutes?'

'About what?' asked Rollison.

'I have just seen Gordon,' said Lorne, as if that was a complete explanation. He stepped inside, making straight for the sitting-room.

Now that he was face to face with the man, Rollison had a better opportunity to assess him, and he admitted that he liked what he saw. Over six feet tall, the blond beard and hair added to Lorne's striking appearance. Rollison noted with approval that he carried himself with an air, and his gaze was direct.

'So you've just come from Gordon,' echoed Rollison.

'Yes. The fool told me what had happened. Why are you interested in me, Mr Rollison?'

'Because you were here last night, without an invitation,' said Rollison.

'Oh, but I was invited. Mrs Morral invited me.'

'I don't think that is true,' said Rollison gently.

'Then ask her,' suggested Lorne. He smiled.

It was then that Rollison conceived an intense dislike for him. He could not have said why; he only knew that in Lorne's smile there was a hint of smug satisfaction, of over-confidence and perhaps of gloating. The man was quite sure that Katrina would say that she had invited him to the party, and was amused at any suggestion to the contrary.

‘I will do that,’ Rollison said gravely.

‘Good. Now, Mr Rollison, will you tell me the real reason why you are interested in me? Has Morral asked for your help?’ There was the suspicion of a sneer in his voice as he spoke of Derek, and it set the seal on Rollison’s dislike.

‘My cousin—’ Rollison began.

‘Your cousin is a fool,’ said Lorne frankly. Undoubtedly he had decided that he would be wise to maintain the offensive. He gave the impression that his visit was hardly worthwhile, that he was talking to someone who lacked intelligence, and he was a little impatient and anxious to get the interview over. ‘That you probably know. I came to tell you, Mr Rollison, that I cannot brook interference with my business, my private and perfectly legitimate business. If Mrs Morral prefers to work for me, and not for her husband, that is no affair of yours. I hope I’ve made myself clear.’

‘Clear as—er—glass,’ murmured Rollison.

Lorne, sensing something ambiguous in the reply, looked up sharply.

‘What do you mean?’

‘Surely that was an admirable illustration,’ said Rollison blandly. He waved a languid hand towards the wall of souvenirs. Lorne said nothing as Rollison lifted from it a crystal ball. ‘Fascinating thing,’ murmured Rollison. ‘Let us see.’ He held the ball close to his eyes, and his expression grew strained, his smile completely disappeared. ‘I can see you walking along a street, not a very crowded street. I can see another man with a very brown face crossing the road. He’s approaching you, he’s getting nearer, he—by George!’ exclaimed Rollison, in dismay. ‘He’s hitting you! You’re falling down!’

Lorne said repressively: ‘I have had enough of this nonsense!’

‘Nonsense?’ echoed Rollison, in a pained voice. ‘But it’s going to happen, I tell you. Hal-*lo*! Here’s another scene, a very crowded room, and everyone seems to be eating something – I can’t quite see what it is. Oh, yes, ice-cream. Ice-*cream*! Lashings of it. And behind it a small glass case fixed to the wall, the glass broken—’

‘If you think I broke that case, you’re mistaken,’ said Lorne. His voice was pitched on a high note, and the result seemed less confident. ‘I was not here when—’

‘It happened,’ murmured Rollison. ‘So you know when it happened? Valuable evidence, the police will like to hear about that.’

‘I tell you—’

‘Now look here,’ said Rollison putting out a hand and pressing it against Lorne’s chest, ‘there are times when other people should do the telling, and this is one of them. Sit down, Lorne.’ He pushed, and the astonished Lorne sank heavily into an easy chair. ‘You know, you behave far too foolishly,’ Rollison went on, ‘by under-rating my intelligence, not to mention the intelligence of the police. They will want to know why you came to my flat last night, and what you did with the arsenic.’

‘I tell you—’

‘No, *I’m* doing the telling,’ said Rollison. He could see the mounting colour on Lorne’s cheeks, and he knew that the man was fast losing his self-control. ‘This isn’t a simple case, Lorne, there are complications, and they affect relatives of mine. I can’t stand by and see that happen, you know. You came here without being invited today, whatever happened last night, and you’ll stay here until the police come and I tell them of your remarkable statements. *And* of the fact that you employed Gordon to have Derek Morral watched. That was foolish of you. You mustn’t go about London having people followed, you know, it isn’t done. Especially when arsenic has been stolen.’

‘All the damned stuff was found!’ growled Lorne.

‘Someone misinformed you,’ said Rollison, gently. *‘Do* sit down.’

Lorne gathered himself for a spring, and when Rollison looked away from him, leapt up from the chair and flung himself bodily forward. His lips were drawn back from his teeth in a manner which showed that he was subject to fits of overpowering rage, amounting almost to madness.

As his arm struck out Rollison seized his wrist. It seemed an insignificant counter-thrust, but Lorne went stiff, and did not try to pull his hand away.

‘Wise man,’ said Rollison. ‘That’s a useful hold. One pull, and the wrist breaks. Now tell me, why did you have Derek Morral followed?’

Lorne growled: ‘That’s my business.’

‘Mine, as it’s in the family,’ said Rollison. ‘Don’t make a fuss, Lorne. It won’t help. You will only get hurt. And it will look odd when I tell the police how you reacted to my polite request for information.’

Lorne drew in his breath sharply, and muttered: ‘He was having me followed, wasn’t he?’

‘Oh, yes. For a good reason. How long have you known Katrina Morral?’

Lorne said: ‘That’s my—’

‘How long?’ snapped Rollison. ‘Did you know her before she came to England?’ He watched the man closely, and although Lorne did not answer, he felt sure that his guess had hit the mark.

He said: ‘I see. The old, old story. And you’re blackmailing her. I don’t like blackmail, Lorne.’

‘You damned fool!’

‘Possibly,’ said Rollison, ‘but we’ll see who is the more foolish. I’ve three things to say to you: *One,* don’t send for Katrina again. *Two*: don’t send threatening letters to Lady Gloria Hurst again—’

He paused, delighted, for Lorne’s stupefaction was so evident that Rollison could have laughed aloud.

‘And thirdly, don’t come here again without being invited.’

He stood aside.

Lorne sat where he was for an appreciable time. Rollison watched him warily, not altogether sure he was not gathering strength for another assault. The man had come full of braggadocio, confident that he would find Rollison easy to handle, and the shock of discovering his mistake had been great.

But he got up eventually, his expression giving nothing away, and moved towards the door. Halfway there, he stopped, turned, and seemed about to speak, but he thought better of it, and went out without another word.

Rollison closed the door after him with a smile of pure enjoyment, then he put his hand inside his jacket, and drew out a pigskin wallet. It was slim and new; and twenty minutes before it had been in Lorne's inside coat pocket. He wondered when Lorne would realise that it had been taken from him when he had made that foolish leap forward.

Rollison took the case to a small table, and emptied it. Several letters fell out. These he placed one by one in front of him; all were addressed to Cedric Lorne, Esquire, at an address in Baker Street. In a second partition were visiting cards with the same address, and a few pound notes which Rollison put together in a bundle. An identity card, an ordinary civilian one, two tickets for the *Palladium* on the following night, and some stamps were added to the neat array on the table. Next he turned his attention to the third partition which appeared to be filled with photographs.

Rollison took out the first of them, half-expecting to see a photograph of Katrina. Instead, he saw a grotesque looking idol, squatting by the side of some gates. Printed in the bottom left-hand corner were the words: *The Holy Gate.* The picture was coloured, but not very well. The result was the more garish and grotesque.

There were other, smaller photographs.

Rollison took them out, less surprised now than he would have been a few moments before. One was of a stool with five legs, and it looked as if the legs and the sides were encrusted with jewels. There was nothing printed on this photograph, and nothing written on the back. He looked at the third and last picture: this time it was of a dancing girl, probably Siamese; she was dressed, indeed, weighed down, in an elaborate costume that seemed to be heavily ornamented with precious stones.

Rollison spread the photographs out in front of him, and sat looking at them with deepening interest.

One thing sprang immediately to his mind; though they would be incongruous in many places in London, they would not be surprising in Derek's flat.

He got up and went to the telephone, dialled Derek's number and was answered almost immediately.

'Rolly here,' said Rollison. 'Can you come to my flat at once?'

'Well, I suppose so,' replied Derek. 'Have you discovered anything?' His voice rose a little, betraying his anxiety.

'I don't know for certain,' said Rollison. 'I think you can help me. It has nothing directly to do with Katrina, but it does concern Lorne.'

'I'll come at once.'

Rollison turned away from the telephone and then sat down and studied the pictures more closely. After a while he took out a volume of the *Encyclopedia Britannica,* and turned to Siam; but there was little in it of interest to him.

The front door bell rang.

'Why, hallo!' said Rollison, trying to hide his disappointment, 'I hardly expected you.' He was puzzled by the way she stood staring at him, and surprised by the change in her. No one could have called her pretty now. She looked as if she had been crying, and he doubted whether she had slept the previous night. 'Come in,' he invited, in a friendly voice.

'No,' she said clearly. 'I want you to come with me.'

'Come with you?' repeated Rollison in bewilderment. 'Where to?'

'Scotland Yard.'

He put a hand on her shoulder.

'Now don't start doing foolish things like that,' he said. 'Before you go to Scotland Yard about anything, you want to discuss it with Uncle Rolly. Come in and sit down, and let me make you a cup of tea.'

'I am not coming in,' declared Mary flatly. 'I want you to come with me, because it is – your fault.'

'I'll come with you if you still want to go after we've had a chat,' said Rollison, taking her arm.

She pulled herself away, swung on her heels, and hurried towards the staircase. He followed her, but was not quick enough to prevent her from starting down the stairs. Near the foot of the first flight, she slipped. Rollison was only a yard behind her, and he shot out a hand to try to save her, but only succeeded in breaking her fall.

'Con*found* the girl!' exclaimed Rollison savagely.

She was not badly hurt, and she was not unconscious, but seemed in a daze, obstinately reiterating that she would not go back to the flat. At last, at the end of his patience, he picked her up and carried her upstairs.

She was heavier than he expected, and he closed the door with his foot, and then carried her into the sitting-room. He turned a large easy chair round with one hand, so that she would not have to sit facing the light, and lowered her into it. She sank back with a sigh that was almost a moan. All the life had been drained out of her, and he began to feel really alarmed. The popular panacea for such ills was a cup of tea, however, and he put on the kettle, then remembered that he had left the contents of Lorne's wallet spread out on the table.

He did not want her to see the photographs, and had she been her normal self, she would undoubtedly have been puzzled by the way the various oddments were set out. He hurried into the room, half-expecting to find that she had recovered enough to bend over the table and inspect the spoils. But she was still leaning back in the easy chair, and her eyes were closed.

The table was empty.

He stood quite still, staring at it; it was of highly-polished walnut, about knee-high, and stood halfway between Mary's chair and the window. Not even the empty wallet was there; everything was gone.

Chapter Nine

Report from Jolly

Rollison looked at Mary without speaking, and then turned on his heel and examined the kitchen door. Standing on the fire-escape outside, he saw the scratches on the lock, and guessed that while he had been on the stairs someone had forced their way into the kitchen, made a clean sweep of the stuff on the table, and escaped before he had returned.

The only thing of which he was not certain was Mary's part in that piece of cool effrontery.

It was possible that she was putting on an act, and that she had come to distract his attention while allowing someone else to break in. He thought it unlikely, however. She had arrived little more than half-an-hour after Lorne had gone, and in that time she could hardly have made herself up to look as lost and forlorn as she did now. It was far more likely that someone had been watching the flat, seen her arrive, and taken the opportunity to break in. Lorne must have discovered his loss almost as soon as he got outside, and planned an immediate counter-thrust.

Ruefully, Rollison made tea.

A strong cup, with plenty of sugar, revived the girl, but not in the way he wanted. She began to whimper, and then to cry. She protested that it was not her fault, that she had believed him when he had said there was only a harmless powder in the tube. After all, it had been a joke, there wasn't anything wrong in taking the tube, she had intended to return it and to pay for the damage to the case. It was all Rollison's fault; he had taken little or no notice of her the previous evening, and had been beastly in every way. She wished she had never gone to his horrible party.

The story came out gradually, between tears and sips of tea. She had come because Tips had told her that morning that he had seen her remove the glass tube. She could not understand Tips; he had not been at all sympathetic, but had insisted on going to see Rollison, and *that* was as good as the police.

There was much that she did not say, and Rollison put his own construction on her story. Piqued because too little notice had been taken of her, Mary had deliberately created a sensation, but the bubble of her notoriety had been pricked when he had held her up to ridicule. Then Tips had turned against her. She had left the party angry and upset, and, when Tips had tackled her that morning, she had seen herself in the guise of a tragedienne. Worry at the possible consequence to those who had taken the arsenic had drained the colour from her face, and she had determined to present herself as an object of pity to Rollison and the police.

That seemed a reasonable summary, thought Rollison. Such a course was characteristic of Mary Henderson.

‘Well, what are you going to do?’ she demanded.

‘I think I’d better tell the police for you,’ said Rollison. ‘If you put the tube behind a vase, and it was stolen from there, you’re not directly to blame because the arsenic got into the ice-cream. If I were you, I’d go home and go to bed.’

Mary responded by bursting into tears.

As he was pacifying her, the front door bell rang. Derek arrived, startled to hear the sound of a woman crying as the door opened. He came in, but stopped abruptly, shooting a suspicious glance towards the sitting-room.

‘Is that Katrina?’ he demanded.

‘No, it isn’t,’ said Rollison, helplessly, ‘though, as you can hear, it’s a hysterical female. She—’ He paused, for a way out of the immediate difficulty presented itself. ‘Derek, things have not gone as I expected them to, and I’m not quite ready for you yet. Will you get a cab and take this girl home, and then come back here?’

‘Who is she?’ demanded Derek, doubtfully.

‘A Mary Henderson,’ said Rollison.

The name meant nothing to Derek, who agreed to see her home. Mary went with him, dabbing at her eyes, and Rollison watched them go with considerable relief. Then he returned to the living-room and telephoned Grice.

The Superintendent was out; Inspector Hill said that he might be able to get in touch with him, however, so Rollison rang off. He waited rather moodily either for Derek’s return, or for Grice to telephone. He had been easily outsmarted, and he was genuinely puzzled by the speed with which Lorne had turned the tables. The man had not impressed him as being particularly brilliant or quick-witted, though self-importance had been evident enough, and a taste for petty authority.

Would Lorne himself have thought and acted so quickly?

Rollison thought it more likely that he would have come blustering back to the flat, declaring that he had been robbed and demanding to know where his wallet was; that would have been in character, but the visit through the kitchen door was more likely to be the work of someone else.

The telephone rang at that moment, and he was glad to hear Grice’s voice. He gave a brief resumé of all that had transpired, including the burglary.

Grice seemed sardonically amused by that.

‘You had a nip of the dog that bit you,’ he said, unkindly.

‘Ha! Ha!’ retorted Rollison. ‘You seem to think this affair is nothing but a laughing match.’

‘I am beginning to wonder whether it’s little more than a storm in a teacup,’ said Grice, unexpectedly.

‘Hmm,’ said Rollison, ‘I suppose I should be grateful for that eleventh hour change of attitude. Why did you think the tube was thrown into the ice-cream? For fun?’

‘The tube might have fallen in by accident.’

‘And pigs might fly,’ said Rollison rudely. ‘Do you think that Lorne came here by the same haphazard course?’

‘There isn’t any known connection between Lorne and the ice-cream,’ said Grice, patiently. ‘He was there at Mrs Morral’s invitation, apparently; probably the other man was, too. Morral himself is naturally prejudiced against Lorne, that’s understandable in the circumstances, isn’t it? He had a nerve to come to the party, but it isn’t the first time there has been a troubled marriage, you know.’

‘Oh,’ said Rollison. ‘We’re doing well. Who sent the threatening letters to Old Glory? They did exist, you know, although they’ve been destroyed.’

‘Now look here, Rolly,’ reasoned Grice, ‘you want to get the right perspective on this. Assume that Katrina was having an affair, the mildest affair you like, with Lorne, and that your aunt discovered it. She, being that way inclined, would meddle; and Lorne, being the man he apparently is, would react very sharply. We have been told that the letters were threatening, but we have not been told that they were anonymous. I think your aunt will probably tell you that they were written by Lorne and that she did not tell you because she knew that there was nothing really serious afoot, except so far as Katrina and Derek Morral were concerned.’

‘I see,’ said Rollison, after a long pause. ‘All right, Bill. That’s the official point of view, and who am I to say it’s wrong?’

‘Now don’t take umbrage,’ urged Grice.

‘I’m not taking umbrage,’ said Rollison, with great deliberation. ‘I am just wondering what bug gets into policemen in cases like these. Come and see me when you’ve a sordid murder on your hands, and I will explain carefully how it was all done by accident. Goodbye!’

He had barely put the receiver down when the telephone bell rang again. He expected it to be Grice with a clever retort he had just thought up, but it was Jolly, and there was a note of excitement in his voice.

Rollison knew him so well that he detected it immediately. So he spoke lightly, not wanting to spoil the man’s satisfaction in whatever disclosure he was going to make.

‘Hallo, Jolly. Having a good time?’

‘Reasonably good, sir,’ said Jolly, ‘and I am finding it just a little disconcerting. As instructed, I followed Gordon, who immediately went to a house in Baker Street and there saw the man who was at the flat last night: the bearded man.’

‘By name, Cedric Lorne,’ said Rollison.

‘I’m glad you know him, sir,’ said Jolly, and Rollison could imagine his serious face, and could imagine also the gleam of pleasure in his eyes. ‘Gordon then left, and I followed him back to the office. I am outside now, sir, and Mrs Morral has just gone in.’

‘Katrina!’ exclaimed Rollison.

‘Mrs Katrina Morral,’ said Jolly, with the satisfaction of one who has shot his bolt. ‘What shall I do now, sir?’

‘Wait there,’ said Rollison, ‘I’m coming at once. Follow Mrs Morral if she

comes out before I do, but let the others go.'

He rang off, wrote a pencilled note for Derek and pinned it to the front door – it said briefly that he had been called away and would be back that evening – and then hurried outside. There was a taxi at the end of the street, and little more than ten minutes after leaving the flat, he got out of the cab in the Strand. Immediately, he caught sight of Jolly.

'Has anyone come out?' he asked, quickly.

'No one at all,' said Jolly, 'but I have been making inquiries, and I believe it is possible to get from that building to the next by the roof. They may have gone out that way.'

'Well, I'll go up to the office, and with luck may find them together. You follow Gordon, I'll look after Katrina.'

'Very good, sir,' said Jolly. 'I hope—look! There *is* Mrs Morral.'

Katrina was leaving the building. She walked slowly, with exceptional grace of movement, and she looked up and down, as if making up her mind which way to go. Then she turned towards Trafalgar Square. Rollison watched her closely as she drew level with him on the other side of the road. She was beautiful; there was no doubt about that. He had not studied her closely enough before to realise quite how lovely she was.

He nodded to Jolly, and walked along the pavement, keeping pace with Katrina. She was so absorbed in her thoughts that she did not look where she was going. Now and again she almost cannoned into passers-by. Each time she looked up with a quick, apologetic smile, but immediately she resumed her slow, thoughtful walk.

Rollison looked behind her.

As he had half-expected a man was walking in her wake. It was certainly no surprise to learn that Gordon was still interested in her movements. He watched the man, who kept his eyes on his quarry, looking neither to right nor left. It was evident that this particular inquiry agent could cope with only one thing at a time: and now it was Katrina.

They walked along Whitehall, then turned into Victoria Street; that suggested, thought Rollison, that Katrina was going to Derek's flat. Derek would certainly not be there, which was a pity. His mind was crowded with thoughts, and there was no difficulty in keeping Katrina in sight.

She turned into Green Street, still pensive, and entered No. 25a. Now the shabby man looked about him, but did not appear to notice Rollison; he was intent only on avoiding being seen by Katrina. He slipped into the porch of a next-door house until she disappeared, and then he followed her inside. Rollison followed him. He heard Katrina walking up the stairs, with a slow, measured tread, and he saw the lift doors close; undoubtedly the follower had decided to go up in the lift.

It started moving; it was a good trick to get upstairs first Rollison thought; no one would dream that someone in front of them was following them.

The lift went upwards, whining. Rollison hesitated; and then he decided that he was taking too much for granted. If the man had instructions only to *follow* Katrina, why had he gone upstairs? He was not a good shadow;

getting in front would probably not occur to him, therefore he had some other motive, and probably he had been instructed to go in front of her; he was waiting there to see her.

The lift stopped. Katrina's footsteps were still just audible.

Rollison ran up the first flight of stairs, swung round the bannisters and hurried up the second. He could see Katrina standing undecidedly at the front door.

The man was standing in the doorway of the opposite flat, and his right hand was hidden.

'Katrina!' shouted Rollison, in sudden alarm. *'Katrina!'*

He saw her turn; saw the man take a gun from his pocket. He raced desperately up the stairs, while Katrina stood quite still, bewildered, and the man raised the gun. The only thing which saved Katrina from immediate death was the man's hesitation. Rollison's call had alarmed him, he was not certain what to do, and he turned the gun on Rollison.

But Rollison was ready. He flung his cigarette-case towards the gun, then jumped the last few steps and reached the landing. The cigarette-case missed, but the man was now too scared to use his gun. He threw it at Rollison, and rushed to the stairs.

Katrina, hurrying towards Rollison, stumbled. Rollison had to choose between saving her from falling and giving chase, and mechanically he put his arm out to save her. The footsteps on the staircase were loud, but getting fainter.

The only hope of catching him now was by the lift. Rollison put Katrina aside and turned towards it, trying not to make undue haste, afraid of fumbling with the door. He got in, the doors closed, and he pressed the ground floor button. It was the only chance he had of reaching the street and seeing which way his quarry was going, but he did not think he was likely to be in time. The lift was travelling very slowly; all his associations with that lift were unpleasant –

Suddenly, it dropped like a bullet!

One moment it was travelling so slowly that he wished he had got out and walked; the next, his stomach gave a sickening lurch as all control of the lift was removed. He saw one landing pass, almost before he realised where he was; then the lift struck the bottom with a crash which deafened him.

He pitched forward.

Chapter Ten

Rescue Squad

'Are you all right?' a voice called. 'Are you all right? *Are you all right?'*

'What?' mumbled Rollison, dazedly. 'What?'

'Are you all right?'

'All – right,' echoed Rollison.

He realised that he was huddled on the floor of the lift, cramped and uncomfortable, and with a dull ache in his legs. He could not remember what had happened, but as the voice made the same cry again and again, and other voices joined it, he realised that he had been knocked out, and was only now regaining consciousness. He remembered that sudden, sickening lurch as the lift had dropped, the frightening moment while he had waited for the crash, and then the crash itself.

Well, he was alive; and he could move his hands. He attempted, rather gingerly, to try out the rest of his limbs, but he was jammed too tightly for freedom of movement. The voice, Katrina's voice, called again: 'Answer, please! Are you all right?'

'Er—yes, I think so,' said Rollison, with as much strength as he could manage.

'We need a rescue squad to get you out,' said a man, and raised his voice. 'Is there much damage inside there?'

Rollison looked about him for the first time, then quavered: 'Well, yes, there is quite a bit.' Two or three wooden panels of the lift were split, the roof was broken, and one floorboard was poking up. The frosted glass, oddly enough, was intact. 'Not that it makes any difference,' he added, suddenly glum.

'Are you *really* all right?' called Katrina.

'I think so,' said Rollison, and then added testily: 'But this is getting us nowhere. Is that rescue squad coming, do you know?'

'He's gone to telephone,' said several people.

Rollison eased himself away from the wall, and then tested his right foot. It was painful when he put much weight on it, and already the ankle was swollen, but he doubted whether anything was broken. His left foot seemed better, but the knee was weak. He stretched himself to his full height; there were sundry bruises everywhere, but nothing which caused him acute discomfort. Relieved, he sat on the tip-up seat, which was still in working order, exchanging comments with the people outside. Then there was a clatter on the stairs, fresh voices, and that of a man in some authority. Before long, a crowbar was being used on the door, and within a quarter-of-an-hour Rollison was helped, limping, into the hall.

A doctor declared that the right ankle and the left knee were injured, which

hardly surprised Rollison, and advised an immediate X-ray. He also made the arrangements, and wanted to send for an ambulance. Rollison protested that a car was good enough and, with Katrina sitting beside him, he was taken to a nursing home and the examination was made.

'There's nothing broken, but the ankle is badly wrenched, I strongly advise home and bed,' the doctor told him.

'Ah, yes,' said Rollison, remembering how Mary Henderson had reacted to the same suggestion. He raised an eyebrow at Katrina, who looked at him without expression. 'I'll promise to lie on a sofa,' he said. 'Will you come with me, Cousin Katrina?'

They were halfway to the flat before Rollison remembered that Derek might be waiting for him there. He looked out of the window of the taxi, but could see no sign of him. Leaning on a borrowed walking stick, he opened the door, and Katrina helped him into the sitting-room.

The journey had been painful. Rollison sank down on the sofa with a sigh of relief. Katrina brought a cushioned footstool and lifted his legs gently.

'Would you like a cup of tea?' she asked.

Rollison chuckled, and she looked at him in surprise.

'No joke really,' he said, 'but I seem to have been offering tea to people in distress all day. Would *you* like some? I'm going to have a whisky-and-soda.'

'I think that is a good idea,' said Katrina. 'Where is the whisky?'

'In the cabinet near the piano,' said Rollison, and watched her as she moved about the flat.

It was easy to understand that Derek was fascinated by her.: She had such exceptional grace of movement. It was a natural grace, coupled with an odd and almost childlike gravity. In spite of her attentiveness, he did not think that her mind was on what she was doing, and sometimes she looked at him as if she could not see him. She poured out two glasses of whisky and soda, and sat down in the nearest chair.

'This is really the first time we have met, isn't it?' murmured Rollison.

'Yes,' she said. 'You had very little time to spare for me last evening. I thought you were like the others, although Aunt Gloria assured me that you were not.'

'You mustn't take everything that Old Glory tells you as gospel,' said Rollison, cheerfully. 'She is full of the best intentions in the world, but sometimes she makes howling mistakes. However, if you mean that you thought I regarded you with strong disapproval, I did not; indeed, the contrary was the case.' He took a pull at his drink. 'Does anything that's happened today occur to you as remarkable?' he asked, 'and for heaven's sake call me Rolly or Richard, whichever you prefer.'

'It shall be Richard then,' Katrina said composedly, 'and as for remarkable happenings, surely it was remarkable that you were behind me in Green Street when that man appeared there with a gun. And it was remarkable that he did not shoot. It was, I think, also remarkable that no one asked any questions about what had happened when the lift fell down.'

She continued to look at him gravely, and he was oddly affected by her

manner and its simple directness. She had obviously learnt English from an excellent tutor.

He had not yet seen her smile.

'I don't know about the lift,' he said. 'It's always going wrong, isn't it? So no one would be very surprised at it going wrong again. As for me being near you at that particular time, I had followed you from Gordon's office.'

'Why?' asked Katrina, without surprise.

'Because the man who met you at the top of the stairs was also following you,' said Rollison.

'I see,' said Katrina. 'That was very good of you.'

Rollison took refuge in another drink. Her directness was almost devastating, and he wondered uneasily whether she was playing a part.

'You seem to take this all very calmly,' he said at last.

'How else can I take it?' asked Katrina, reasonably. 'I am, of course, frightened part of the time, but I have often been frightened. You see, I have always lived in Poland. I am English, really. My father was English.'

'Ah,' said Rollison. 'Such stories one hears! I thought at least you were a Russian Princess bent on espionage. Tell me, Katrina' – and this time he was serious – 'do you think that man was there with the intention of shooting you?'

'Yes,' she said calmly.

'Do you know why he should want to do that?'

'No,' said Katrina, 'except—' She paused, but did not look away from him. 'Except that perhaps some people believe that I will tell Derek where I sometimes go. I will not, of course.'

'Will you tell me?' asked Rollison.

'No,' said Katrina.

'Well, that's frank enough,' said Rollison, ruefully.

She shrugged her shoulders. 'I must tell no one, but—I wish that Derek would trust me. I wish—'

She broke off, and rising with surprising grace walked to the window. She stood there, unmoving, her head thrown back. He studied her, closely. Everything she wore was of good quality and in admirable taste, and she carried herself with a dignity unusual in so young a woman.

Then she turned, with a swift movement which startled him.

'This is not fair!' she cried, and her cheeks were flushed, she was not far removed from panic. 'You should have told me!'

'Told you what?'

'Derek is coming!' Her alarm was genuine, she began to look about the flat as if seeking somewhere to hide. 'I cannot see him now, I tell you I cannot see him!'

'Then open the front door, so that he can walk in, and then slip into that room,' said Rollison, indicating Jolly's bedroom door. 'Derek won't know you're here.'

She went to the front door, to save him the need of getting up; returned, picked up her glass and her cigarette-case, which was lying near it, glanced

round swiftly as if to make sure that she had left no other evidence of her presence, and then hurried away. The door closed behind her. Rollison sat back, frowning, listening for Derek's footsteps.

Derek was not alone. Voices sounded, and he recognised with a sinking heart that one of them was Lady Gloria's.

'Hallo,' said Derek, in surprise, 'the front door isn't shut.'

'Come in!' called Rollison. 'It was left open for the convenience of callers. Sorry I can't get up.' He waved to them as they entered, Old Glory full of concern, Derek startled. 'I had a minor accident,' said Rollison, 'and I'm told I shall be unable to walk with comfort for the next few days. Rather a bother, actually.'

'It will keep you out of mischief at any rate,' said Lady Gloria, tartly.

Rollison stared at her in astonishment.

'After all you've said and done to get me *into* mischief!'

'Don't waste time in talking nonsense,' said Lady Gloria, examining the bandages at his ankle and his knee. 'You ought to be in bed. Where is Jolly?'

'Out after the bad men,' said Rollison.

'His place is here,' said Old Glory.

'I'd heard of the inconsistency of women,' marvelled Rollison, 'but you beat the band! Sit down, help yourselves to drinks, and look as if you're enjoying life.'

'It is too early for me to have anything,' said his aunt austerely. 'Now, what have you been doing to yourself?'

'Falling down,' said Rollison, evasively. 'It's not serious, so it doesn't greatly matter. One way and another I've had quite an afternoon,' he went on, looking at Derek. 'I wanted your advice on one or two curious pictures which I discovered in the wallet of one of the bad men; but they were taken away from me before you arrived, so that's out.'

'What *are* you burbling about?' demanded Lady Gloria.

'Curious pictures,' said Rollison. 'Photographs.' He fixed a speculative eye on Derek. 'One was of a three-legged stool,' he went on blandly, 'the other of a dancing girl, and the third of a particularly nasty looking idol standing outside some gates. All Siamese work, I imagine.'

Derek's interest grew. By the time Rollison had finished, he was staring at him with consternation, and Lady Gloria had the wit to realise that it was not the moment to interrupt.

Derek said sharply: 'Who had these pictures?'

'The man we know of as Lorne,' said Rollison.

'So *that's* it!' exclaimed Derek. 'I'd no idea, no idea at all!' There was excitement in his manner, and he contrived to pass it on to the others. *'That's* what they're after!' He paused. 'Those things are priceless, Rolly. There are two identical sets, each as valuable as the other. One set is still in Bangkok, the second I was entrusted with and managed to get out of the country, in order to save it from the Japs. I was in Siam when war broke out,' he threw out in explanation.

He was walking up and down the room now, too agitated to choose his

words.

'It isn't only the value,' he went on excitedly, 'although they must be worth – well – fifty thousand pounds each is the absolute minimum. It's the religious association, there are sects in Siam which look on those things as holy. They are religious relics, handed down over the centuries.'

He broke off, and went to the telephone.

Rollison, trying not to show his own increasing excitement exchanged glances with Old Glory, who nodded and then watched Derek. He dialled a number, then waited with growing impatience; at last he asked: 'Is that the Oriental Museum? … Give me the curator … Morral, Derek Morral, and hurry, please, this is urgent.'

He was tapping his foot up and down as he waited.

Rollison whispered: 'Glory, the front door – could you shut it?'

Lady Gloria got up at once, realising that Rollison was suddenly afraid that someone else might come in. In fact Rollison was now acutely aware of his carelessness in leaving the front door open without making sure that it was watched. During the conversation someone might have crept in, all sound of movement muffled by the talk in the sitting-room. He wished he could move about, comfortably, and have a look round. His aunt shut the door with a snap.

'That's more sensible,' she said.

'Much,' said Rollison. 'Thanks.'

Derek was speaking again.

'Jarman? … Morral here. You have those three packages which I sent to you, haven't you? … I wonder if you'll check up? … Yes, I'll hold on, thanks.' He stood waiting again, but this time he talked to Rollison and Old Glory. 'I had them crated, managed to get them to London, and stored them in the vaults at the Oriental Museum. I want to make sure that they go back only to the owners, and things like that are pretty hot, you know.'

'Hot?' asked Lady Gloria.

Derek said impatiently: 'If anyone took a few of the gems with which they're encrusted, he would have a pretty fair picking. They—'

He stopped abruptly, and his face went white. It was an odd thing to watch the colour receding, tension replacing impatience. He looked as if someone had struck him a severe blow.

'So *that's* what she wanted,' he said.

No one could doubt that by 'she' he meant Katrina.

There was a brief, tense pause, and then he exclaimed: 'It's damnable! Damnable! Katrina—'

'Now don't jump to conclusions,' said Rollison, quietly.

'It is obvious that—'

'Nothing is obvious except that you have some peculiar ideas,' said Old Glory, in her most forbidding tone.

Rollison was immediately aware that both he and Old Glory had made a mistake in speaking. Derek closed his lips, and it was almost possible to hear him thinking that he would not say another word about Katrina. Against

that, Rollison put the other side of the picture, the advantages which Derek's statement gave them. Mists of doubt had been cleared away, if Derek were right in thinking that the Siamese relics were concerned, there was no longer any mystery about the motive.

'Hallo,' Derek said, suddenly. 'Yes, Jarman … You are quite sure? … Thanks, thanks very much. Will you give special instructions to have them closely watched? … No, no particular reason,' he added, and that sounded lame. 'A fit of nerves, I've had charge of them too long … Yes, very well, thanks. Goodbye.'

He rang off, and passed a hand slowly over his eyes. When he took it away again they were seen to be glassy with pain.

Rollison said: 'So you think there might be an effort to steal them?'

'I have no doubt at all that Lorne wants to find out where they are,' said Derek, 'and if he finds out—'

'It will be a simple matter to arrange for the police to take extra precautions at the museum,' Rollison said.

'Can you arrange that?'

'Yes.'

'Then I'll be glad if you will.'

'Is it not time that you were relieved of the responsibility for such things?' demanded Old Glory.

'It's impossible to evade responsibility,' said Derek, brusquely. 'Oh, they're not really in my care, and the Foreign Office knows all about them, but only one or two men besides myself know what is in the crates and where the crates are stored. There was some talk of shipping them back to Siam in the autumn, but conditions are still unsettled out there.' He raised his hands helplessly. 'Well, there it is. Will you tell the police at once?'

'Telephone Scotland Yard for me, and ask Superintendent Grice if he can come here now,' said Rollison.

A heavy, thumping sound came from Jolly's bedroom, followed by a stifled exclamation. Before Rollison could speak again, Derek strode towards the door, and Old Glory half rose in her chair.

In a moment Derek and Katrina would be face to face.

Chapter Eleven

The Shabby Man Again

Rollison tried to get up, but the pressure on his ankle was too painful. He sank back as Derek flung the door of Jolly's bedroom open. Rollison could not see what happened, but he heard another exclamation.

It was not in Katrina's voice!

Derek reeled back. He fell heavily, knocked down by a powerful blow. During the confusion which followed – for somehow Old Glory and Rollison became mixed up in it – Rollison caught a glimpse of Derek's assailant. Without doubt it was the man who had followed Katrina.

Then the door swung shut with a violent thud followed by the drag of furniture as it was hauled along to act as reinforcement. Derek stumbled to his feet and attempted a renewed attack, but it was a waste of time; the door held.

'Go downstairs!' cried Rollison. 'Through the kitchen!'

Derek stopped hammering at the door, and hurried into the kitchen. The clanging sound of his feet on the iron rungs of the fire-escape floated into the room.

'We're doing well,' Rollison said, gloomily.

'You will do serious harm to your leg if you get up again,' said Old Glory, breathlessly. It was obvious that she was not only badly shaken, but frightened.

Rollison knew that he would not be able to help even if he got to his feet, and he stared at the door in a growing fever of impatience and anxiety.

Then there came a ring at the front door bell.

Old Glory hurried across the room, and Rollison waited tensely; if Jolly had returned, something might be done. When he heard Gloria speak he was even more relieved, however, for Grice answered her.

At her words of alarm he strode unceremoniously into the flat.

'What on earth's going on here?'

Steps on the fire-escape clanked dispiritedly as Derek returned, angry and disappointed. He had seen the man reach the ground, after climbing through the bedroom window, he said savagely. The fellow was off like a flash.

Between them they forced the door of the bedroom, and Derek was about to enter the room when Rollison called him back.

'I want to see—' began Derek.

'Lend me a hand,' said Rollison, and when he was on his feet, with his stick in one hand and supported by Derek on the other side, he said quietly: 'Katrina was in there.'

He felt Derek's fingers press deeply into his arm.

Then Grice called out: 'Get a doctor, at once.'

Lady Gloria went quickly to the telephone.

So it was like that, thought Rollison, feeling desperately anxious as he hobbled towards the door.

Katrina was lying back in an easy chair. A tie was bound tightly about her neck, but it fell slack as Grice cut it. Her lips were swollen and her eyes closed. There was a bruise on her arm and another on the side of her face.

Derek said: 'She—she isn't—'

'Of course she's not dead,' Grice said, without looking round. 'Help me to lift her.' Derek left Rollison unsupported, and hurried forward. Between them they lifted Katrina on to Jolly's bed, and Grice began artificial respiration. Rollison hobbled to a chair, sat down and felt Katrina's pulse; though faint, it was beating fairly steadily. He nodded reassuringly to Derek, who stood white-faced, a victim of his own tormented thoughts.

Gloria came in. 'The doctor will be here in ten minutes,' she said.

'Make some strong tea, will you?' asked Grice.

Old Glory went off. Derek, his forehead damp with sweat, watched Grice working with steady persistence. It was impossible to tell what progress he was making, although Katrina's face looked less swollen by the time the doctor arrived. He was a youngish man who immediately took over. He worked only for a few minutes, before saying reassuringly: 'She'll be all right. Get her into bed and keep her warm. As soon as she comes round, hot tea or coffee will help her. I don't think there will be a great deal to worry about.'

'Are you sure?' snapped Derek.

'Yes, yes,' said the doctor, soothingly, 'there's no need for anxiety.'

As he spoke, Katrina opened her eyes.

It was quiet in the flat and Rollison was half-dozing. He was sitting in an easy chair, with his legs up, and Old Glory was at the bureau, writing, the light from a table lamp shining on her white hair; the faint scratching of her pen was the only sound that broke the silence. In the small bedroom, Derek was sitting by Katrina's side, and as far as Rollison knew, Katrina was sleeping, the result of a sedative which the doctor had prescribed.

It was nearly eleven o'clock.

Grice had listened to what they had to tell him, promised to have a special patrol arranged at the Oriental Museum, and left with the avowed intention of catching Katrina's assailant before the night was out. Rollison thought that the policeman was too sanguine; he himself had seriously revised his opinion that the man was nervous and uncertain. The fracas at the flat had shown him to be very far from that.

They had been able to reconstruct much of what had happened. Katrina had told him that the man must have been already hiding in the bedroom when she had gone in, for no one had entered the room by the window. She had been leaning her arms on the window sill, looking out, when he had suddenly attacked her from behind. She had struggled, but the man had quickly overpowered her.

So, thought Rollison, the man had come to the flat straight from Green

Street, probably guessing that Rollison would bring Katrina with him. He had made two deliberate attempts to murder Katrina within three hours. If Derek were right in assuming that Katrina was an associate of thieves who were anxious to find out where the Siamese relics were kept, how could that be reconciled with the attempts to murder her?

Rollison doubted whether it could be. He was certainly not convinced that Katrina was willingly helping Lorne.

The situation was bad enough in itself. There was no longer any question of accidents, and Grice was now fully convinced of that.

Rollison, knowing that he himself would be unable to get about for several days, felt useless and exasperated.

In spite of the quiet of the flat and Lady Gloria's steady writing, he found it difficult to think calmly about what had happened. Yet the chain of events was clear enough. Whoever had put the arsenic in the ice-cream had, almost certainly, intended it for Katrina. That, it seemed, had been the first attempt to murder her. He was troubled because the poisoning had been so widespread, and admitted to himself that it was possible that other intended victims had been at his flat. For the moment, however, that possibility was irrelevant. If he accepted the theory that it had been primarily an attempt to murder Katrina, it was by no means surprising that there had been a further attempt on her life.

Nor were his own misadventures difficult to explain. From the moment he had taken an interest in Katrina, he had, by reason of his reputation, become a danger to the success of the plot. Locked in the lift by the simple method of switching off the electric current, he had been prevented from finding out who had visited Derek's flat when he had first gone to see his cousin. The mechanical faults in the lift had probably put the idea in the mind of the man who had trapped him there.

This man, then, must have been watching Derek's flat while the intruder was upstairs. Probably the same man, possibly Lorne or the man with the hooked nose, had also been keeping watch when Katrina had gone in that day, followed by her would-be murderer. Immediately Rollison had arrived, the watcher had seen an opportunity to put him out of action.

Grice had been able to report that the mechanism of the lift had been deliberately damaged. That had been a comparatively simple act for a man with even a rudimentary mechanical knowledge to do. Thus, it was possible to see the way in which the action in the case had developed. At first sight each incident had appeared to be unconnected with any other, but such a theory did not stand up to investigation.

Lorne's visit was also in keeping with the general conduct of the men who wanted Katrina dead. Over-confident, he had come to threaten, and received a severe shaking. He had not, however, been allowed to visit Gresham Terrace on his own. Someone else had been outside and, on receiving Lorne's report, had asked questions and discovered that Lorne's wallet was missing. The seriousness of losing the photographs had immediately become obvious to this unknown man, for clearly the case turned on the precious

relics. To make sure that Rollison did not find this vital clue, the man had made his daring burglary.

Whether Mary Henderson had been a party to that burglary did not really matter. She would, of course, have to be watched, and the opportunity of finding out more of her part in the mystery would eventually present itself.

Not many men were so gifted that they could break into a flat with such speed and efficiency. The fact that Katrina's near-murderer had done so once, suggested that it was he who had taken away the contents of Lorne's wallet. The police were now busily engaged in a search for him, and for Lorne.

Handicapped as he now was, Rollison could do little about that; but he might be able to learn a great deal from Katrina, Derek and Old Glory.

He wished that he had been able to give Grice a better description of Katrina's assailant. He had gathered that the fellow was shabby and needed a shave, but his features had made no impression. Probably this was partly due to the fact that he had wrongly assumed that the man was of no importance; now that his opinion was so drastically revised, he found it easy to believe that the shabbiness and unshaven chin had been a disguise. There was one other thing that he had been able to tell Grice; the man was on the plump side; but it was little enough, even with that.

Gordon, however, could probably be persuaded to give further information to the police. An interview with Gordon was high on Grice's list of priorities.

Rollison suddenly thought of Jolly.

It was not like Jolly to be away for so long without reporting by telephone. He had followed Gordon, and it was possible that Gordon had gone some way out of London. Perhaps the police would be unable to find him. Rollison began to worry about Jolly, and to heighten his anxiety, Old Glory finished her letter and turned from the desk.

'Where *is* Jolly?'

'I wish I knew,' said Rollison.

'I always understood that he was most reliable,' said Old Glory provocatively.

'Jolly's doing what I told him to do,' said Rollison, a little wearily. 'You're not being helpful, Glory. There are times when you are more than a little like Aunt Mattie.'

Lady Gloria laughed, and rested her hand on his shoulder.

'I suppose I asked for that, Rolly,' she said, 'but you must admit the whole thing is very provoking – though more for you than for me, I suppose. Tell me what you want me to do.'

Rollison said: 'That's much better. Now tell *me.* What was your *real* reason in bullying me to give a party?'

She laughed again; and it was possible to see her as she had been in her youth, vivacious and full of vitality, as remarkable a woman then as she was now.

'I wanted to bring Derek and Katrina together, and I thought that was the

best way to do it,' she said, 'and I also wanted you to—'

'Yes, yes,' said Rollison. 'I know of one, and guessed the other. Did Katrina come to see you?'

'No. When Derek and she parted, I went to see her,' said Lady Gloria. 'She convinced me that whatever she did when she went away, she was *not* unfaithful to Derek. Derek would not believe that. I was a little troubled,' Old Glory went on, 'when I received two or three unpleasant letters—'

'Addressed in red ink?'

'Yes. You startled me when you referred to that,' said Gloria. 'I didn't realise how quickly you would set to work. They were foolish letters, of course, telling me to mind my own business and not to interfere with Derek and Katrina. I once even thought that Derek had written them himself, but I don't think so now. This man Lorne appears to be the culprit.'

'Possibly,' admitted Rollison. 'Grice will want to know all you can tell him about them.'

'Do you mean that you don't think Lorne is the man?'

'I'm taking nothing for granted, yet,' said Rollison. 'It all goes much deeper than I had thought, certainly deeper than you had thought.'

'I suppose you mean that you cannot understand why Lorne thought it necessary to part Derek and Katrina to obtain information about the relics?'

'Yes,' said Rollison, slowly, 'and I can't yet understand why someone decided to kill Katrina, and also to risk killing a dozen other people in the attempt. However, that started it as far as I'm concerned. I think that when we know the secret of the ice-cream, we shall have the solution to the whole mystery. This sounds very kindergarten but I think it's true. I wish—'

The telephone bell rang.

Lady Gloria answered it, and Rollison watched her in the soft light shed by the single lamp. She spoke quietly, sitting down as she did so; and then she jumped up in alarm and exclaimed: 'Jolly! Are you sure?'

'What is it?' called Rollison, anxiously.

Gloria said: 'They're going to raid the museum tonight, Jolly says so. What do I dial?'

'Put the receiver back, leave it for twenty seconds, that should clear it, then dial Whitehall 1212,' said Rollison, almost distrait. 'More haste, less speed, remember. That's right … Now lift the receiver …'

As she obeyed, Derek came out of the next room.

The police were not able to estimate how many people took part in the raid on the Oriental Museum. Not until afterwards was it discovered that several men had stayed behind after the doors had been closed for the night, hiding themselves in the larger rooms, until the moment to strike had come. Then the police inside the museum were overpowered with comparative ease; the curator, who had stayed late, and the special nightwatchman had also been put out of action. The keys to the vaults were obtained without difficulty, and the three precious crates were first opened, to make sure that the contents were genuine, then refastened and carried to a small van which

was standing in a side street. Before that was done the three patrol policemen were deliberately distracted by a sound of breaking glass from another part of the museum. From start to finish the raid was carried out with remarkable efficiency.

Nothing else was stolen.

Chapter Twelve

Week of Suspense

It was nearly one o'clock when Jolly reached Gresham Terrace. Immediately, he told his story. He had followed Gordon to a house near Woking, and Gordon had stayed there for some time. Hidden behind a clump of shrubs Jolly had seen the shabby man arrive, most surprisingly, in an expensive car. Soon afterwards, others had arrived. Jolly deduced from this that an important conference was going on in the house.

He had found a way in, and overheard plans for raiding the museum. Then he had tried to get out. Almost at once he had been caught and locked in one of the rooms of the house. By then he knew the others, including Gordon, were going to the scene of the robbery. They had left him alone, apparently satisfied that he could do nothing to prevent their scheme from being carried out.

Now he blamed himself for not having telephoned Scotland Yard, but pointed out that he had not known Rollison was incapacitated.

'You can't blame yourself,' Rollison said, reassuringly. 'It would have made no difference, anyhow, the goods were on the road long before Grice got there.'

'If you say so, sir,' said Jolly gravely. 'But there is one point I find more than a little puzzling.'

'Only one?' murmured Rollison.

'As this one concerns me personally, I have singled it out for attention,' said Jolly, with great dignity. 'I will freely admit, sir, that I did not expect to leave that house alive. I cannot understand why I was left there, unhurt, and not too securely fastened in.'

Rollison said: 'In our experience, few people commit murder for murder's sake. You were no immediate danger to them, as far as they knew, and there was no need to have your death added to their other crimes.'

'Maybe, but had I escaped earlier, I might have prevented the robbery,' said Jolly.

'And had you escaped earlier, you might have found someone waiting for you outside,' said Rollison with a grin.

Jolly looked at him in some dismay.

'Do you know, sir, I had not thought of that!'

'You would have done,' said Rollison, consolingly. 'Exactly where was this house?'

'In Forest Avenue, Woking,' said Jolly. 'It was only partly furnished, and I think when the police make inquiries they will find that it is unoccupied.'

'You're probably right,' said Rollison, and stifled a yawn. 'Well, what are we going to do for the night?'

'With your permission, sir, I will make do with an easy chair,' said Jolly.

‘As Mr Morral is here, there is no need for Lady Gloria to remain. I think we will be well-advised to allow her to return home. She is not young, and she really should rest.’

‘All right,’ said Rollison, ‘that seems reasonable.’

Lady Gloria raised no objections, and Jolly obtained a taxi for her; she refused any escort home. Rollison meanwhile struggled to get his clothes off, but could not succeed without Jolly’s help.

‘Well, it looks as if I’m out for the rest of this show,’ Rollison declared sourly.

‘I don’t think it is going to end as quickly as all that, sir,’ said Jolly.

‘Grice will move heaven and earth to get those cases back,’ declared Rollison. ‘He might even get them tonight.’

Grice, however, had nothing to report next morning.

The house at Woking proved to be untenanted, and the little furniture there had been left for sale by the previous tenant. Gordon had disappeared, and the scared girl in his office said she could tell the police nothing. The only agent Gordon had employed for two weeks was the shabby man: there was no record of the man’s name or address, and no trace of him.

Although there was a description of the van which had been used for the removal of the crates, it was not discovered until two mornings later, when it was found abandoned in a wood near Woking. The police found no fingerprints and nothing to indicate who had used it, but they did learn that it had been stolen from a bakery in the East End of London, although to make identification more difficult, the name and address of the baker had been painted out.

As the days passed Rollison found his enforced inaction more and more infuriating. Katrina had already left the flat, with Derek, for Green Street. Nothing had been said, but obviously they had agreed to live together again.

One of the most curious things, Rollison thought, was the fact that they had talked little about the past events. As far as he knew, Katrina had given no explanation of her association with Lorne and the man with the hooked nose. The police could get nothing from her, and it was reasonable to assume that Derek had fared no better; yet he appeared to ignore that, now. The sudden crisis, the moment when he had realised that she had been so near to death, had broken down the barriers of suspicions and restraint.

But Rollison wondered if either of them was really happy.

Katrina’s gravity remained; she did not smile; she had a simple, almost childlike manner, which Rollison had found curiously attractive when he had first talked with her, but now he found himself wondering whether it were a deliberate pose.

Derek, although quiet, was reasonably cheerful. He had photographs of the relics as well as of all the more important jewels. He gave a set of similar ones to Rollison, and to Grice.

There was no sign of Lorne, who had vanished as completely as the others.

The newspapers, thriving on the robbery, had exaggerated Rollison’s part

in the affair, and the word 'Toff' appeared freely in the headlines. The main point of interest was, of course, the three missing relics. Every newspaper employed an 'expert' to write articles about the dancing girl, the stool and the idol, and most of them differed in detail. There was general agreement, however, on the value of the relics; no paper put them lower than two hundred thousand pounds, none more than a quarter of a million. The figures themselves may have impressed the general public, but they did not greatly impress Rollison. The thieves would be quite unable to sell them at anything like that amount; the most likely thing, he thought, was that they would be stripped of their jewels, and each jewel would be put on to the market separately.

Grice, of course, was fully prepared for such an attempt. He obtained exhaustive descriptions of each article, and set his men to watch every known jewel-fence. Throughout the country the same close watch was kept, but nothing had as yet transpired.

Sitting in an easy chair, with one leg up and the other nearly back to normal, Rollison looked at Grice, who had just come in, and asked whether there were any further reports.

Grice shook his head with a grunt of dissatisfaction.

'No, nothing, I'm afraid.'

'I suppose it is early,' said Rollison, musingly. 'They won't start to sell until the heat's died down. Have you discovered anything fresh about the reaction on the original owners?'

'A temple in Siam is so remote,' said Grice, reasonably. 'Each of the three things is of great importance there, but I can't think of them as anything but precious stones. How did Morral first get on to them?' he added. 'I've never had a really satisfactory answer from him, nor from his wife.'

'In some ways they're a curious couple,' admitted Rollison. 'All I know is that Derek had an official appointment in Siam before the Japs took over, and he managed to get these things sent to England. Then he was recalled, made arrangements for their safe keeping, and immediately after was posted to Russia. He speaks Russian fluently and I'm told he did a useful job out there.'

'I imagine that he would,' said Grice. 'What about his wife?'

'English father, Polish mother, spent most of her life in Poland. I don't know any more,' said Rollison.

Grice surprised him by saying: 'I know a little more. She was in Warsaw in 1939, lived pretty grimly for two years, and then managed to escape to the Russian lines. What she did then, I've no idea, but as a refugee she would hardly expect to move in the same circles as your cousin.'

'No,' admitted Rollison, 'but she did meet him, and that's all we can say about it.'

'Leaving that for a moment,' said Grice, 'my chief worry is, that she will say nothing at all. You realise, don't you, that she is the only person known to have been acquainted with Lorne before this trouble brewed up?'

Rollison nodded.

‘I’ve questioned her closely,’ Grice went on, ‘but she will not say a word of what happened during the periods when she left Morral. On that alone I should be justified in detaining her as a material witness.’

‘I doubt it,’ declared Rollison. ‘You’ve no direct evidence that Lorne had anything to do with the robbery. You think he had, and so do I, but that’s not proof. Therefore, we can’t assume that she could help us to find anyone who could explain the robbery.’ When Grice did not answer, he went on: ‘You must realise that, too, or you would have taken more active steps. I’m glad you haven’t. I’ll learn the truth from her, sooner or later.’

‘But will you pass it on to me?’ asked Grice, sceptically.

‘Yes certainly, if it’s material evidence.’

‘All right,’ said Grice. ‘Now, there’s the other thing. Presumably Lorne knew Katrina before she came to England.’

‘Why do you think that?’

‘Isn’t it obvious? As soon as she reached England with her husband, Lorne got in touch with her. Not only that, he was able to exert some influence.’

‘I wouldn’t take it for granted that they were known to one another before she got here,’ said Rollison. ‘It’s likely, I grant, but it can’t be assumed.’

‘Then what hold has Lorne got over her?’

Rollison said: ‘They could have used threats against Derek. Whatever we *don’t* know about her, we *do* know that she is in love with him. I’ve watched them closely and I’m sure of it.’

Grice gave a defeated grin.

‘Out of my province, old chap.’

‘And he with her,’ declared Rollison. ’There remains the grounds of serious trouble between them, and I’m as interested in seeing them happy as I am in finding the sparklers.’ He leaned forward, lifting a wooden box from the table. ‘Ever seen these?’ he asked, and began to put the photographs Derek had given him on the table, as if he were laying out playing cards for patience.

Each photograph was of a single jewel, or a cluster of jewels. Grice shrugged.

‘I can’t tell one from another, though I’ve seen them often enough. There are copies in every police station in Great Britain.’ He picked a card up. ‘One’s got to have a certain flair for jewels, I suppose, and you’ve got it and I haven’t.’

‘Well, I’ve managed to memorise them,’ said Rollison, ‘all but one or two. Jolly’s been playing the same game.’ He shuffled the photographs, and left them in a single heap.

Grice chuckled.

‘Well, I’m more at home dealing with ice-cream laced with arsenic – though I still think it *might* have been an accident.’

Rollison shook his head.

‘Not a hope. One day perhaps we’ll feel safe enough to take bets on it! Meanwhile, I give you warning: in two days’ time I shall be up and about

again. I want to have another shot at finding these things.' He tapped the playing-cards.

'Well, take this for your comfort. No one will be able to get them out of the country,' said Grice, confidently.

He had barely taken his leave when there was a brisk ring of the front door bell, thrice repeated. As Jolly opened the door, Sheila Gregory's gay and confident voice could be heard: 'Hallo, Jolly, how well you look! Is he in?'

'Yes, Madam,' said Jolly, primly.

'Rolly, *darling!*' exclaimed Sheila, bursting into the sitting-room, 'I only realised you'd been badly hurt this morning, and as I was coming to London I *had* to see you.'

She put down a cardboard box with one hand and tidied away a stray tendril of red hair with the other.

'Eggs!' she announced with her usual buoyancy. 'Laid this morning, just right for an invalid. I was afraid, in the excitement, I might forget them.' Her eyes were brimming over with delight, and she gripped his hands. 'This is *really* important!'

'And the happy day?' asked Rollison, gently.

'Rolly!' cried Sheila, in astonishment. 'You've guessed! How in*cred*ible. But you're not always right,' she added, frankly, 'you thought our marriage would be a flop, didn't you? And it hasn't been. I'm blissfully happy, though I wasn't a bit sure I would like to settle down on a poultry farm. Have *you* ever thought of buying one?'

'No,' said Rollison.

'I think you'd do well,' said Sheila, judicially. 'You've got the right temperament.' She sat back and clasped her hands about her knees. 'Rolly, *isn't* it wonderful? About the end of November!'

'Blessings,' murmured Rollison.

'And but for you, I doubt whether we would have got married,' said Sheila, 'so you do something useful sometimes, you see. Oh, that reminds me, *can't* you help Mary?'

'Mary Henderson?'

'Yes. She's absolutely *mis*erable.'

'I haven't seen her for over a week,' said Rollison.

'Well, she ought to have called to see how you were,' said Sheila, 'but you mustn't hold that out against her. It's Tips. She's *madly* in love with him.'

'I doubt whether she could be madly in love with anyone, ' said Rollison drily.

'You once thought that about me,' said Sheila, 'and you were quite wrong. She came down to the farm for two days, you know, and she looked ghastly when she arrived, but much better when she left again, and she told me everything. About Tips. He was absolutely all for her until your party, and then—well, do you know what he's doing now?'

'No,' said Rollison, 'but I'm quite sure you're about to tell me.'

'He's taking Florence Hardy *everywhere,'* said Sheila.

Rollison laughed. ‘Well, why not stop worrying about Mary, who has broken as many hearts as ever you did, and rejoice with Florence – if rejoicing’s in order.’

‘I suppose that’s one way of looking at it,’ admitted Sheila, ‘but I can’t bear to see anyone unhappy. Still, Tips must be serious about Florence, I think, he’s given her an absolutely marvellous brooch, and—Rolly, what’s the time? Why, it’s nearly twelve o’clock, I’ve an appointment at twelve, I must fly. Good luck, darling, goodbye!’ She pressed his hands and hurried to the door. Halfway across the hall, she stopped and called: ‘Rolly!’

‘Yes?’

‘*Will* you be a godfather? Oh, I can’t stop, say you will, you *must* say you will.’ She stood in the doorway for a moment, wide-eyed and very appealing. Rollison laughed.

‘Gladly! But if you’ve an eye to silver christening mugs and it turns out to be twins I’ll change to porridge spoons!’

‘*Bless* you!’ cried Sheila, and blew him a kiss. ‘Goodbye, Jolly,’ she said, and hurried off, this time for good.

When Jolly returned to the room, Rollison was studying the photographs of the jewels again. He looked up.

‘Jolly, do you happen to know where Mr Tippets and Miss Hardy go in the evenings?’

‘I haven’t the slightest notion,’ said Jolly.

‘Well, it would help me a lot if you acquired one,’ Rollison said with a grin. ‘I’m *very* interested in the jewels which Mr Tippets is presenting to his lady. Is it possible for you to find out for me?’

Chapter Thirteen

Gifts of Great Price

Tips was a man of taste, and showed a nice discrimination in the restaurant where he took Florence Hardy on most evenings. It was the *Kundle,* and was neither a night club nor a popular restaurant, but a cross between the two. It was in a side street off Shaftesbury Avenue, and when Rollison went in with Katrina and Derek, three days after Sheila's visit, there was the inevitable hum of conversation, yet an atmosphere of quiet, comfort and well-being.

Rollison did not know it well, though well enough to ask for a table in the Oak Room.

The head waiter's eyes lit up.

'I am very glad that its reputation has reached you, Mr Rollison, I *think* I can find a table there for you. Will you wait just a moment?'

'This room would have done us quite well,' said Derek,

'There's dancing upstairs,' said Rollison.

Derek shrugged his shoulders.

It was the first time that he and Katrina had met Rollison since they had left his flat for their own, and they had accepted his invitation to dine with him, although he had the impression that neither of them were particularly enthusiastic. What was it they lacked? Spirit and life, in some degree, as if each was filled with secret thoughts, thoughts which neither dared to utter. The breach which had once seemed healed was in fact only patched. Now and again on the journey, by taxi, Rollison had seen Derek glancing furtively at his wife, and Katrina looking equally furtively at her husband. Both glances showed the lack of trust between them.

They had been closely watched at Green Street, for Grice had determined to take no risk of Katrina being attacked again. Even tonight, two of his men had followed them to *Kundle's,* and would later follow the couple home.

While Katrina had been leaving her wrap in the cloakroom, Derek had said bluntly: 'You're not going to try to get anything more out of her, are you?'

'It's a closed book while she wants it closed,' Rollison had answered. 'But there's one thing you ought to know.'

'What is it?'

'The police have been very restrained,' Rollison had told him. 'They would be justified in taking a much stronger line. Don't be too surprised if they do so.'

'I'll deal with the police,' Derek had said.

So now there was all the makings of a jolly evening, thought Rollison, a little grimly. Nevertheless he was in a state of curious excitement. Long shots always had that effect on him.

The head waiter came back, all smiles.

‘There is a table, Mr Rollison, and I will see you upstairs a little later. I am sure you will find everything as you would like it.’

‘Thank you,’ said Rollison.

He found the Oak Room a little different from his preconceived ideas about it. Pleasant and light, the tables were spaced well around a dance floor neither too large nor too small. An orchestra was playing softly, but only three couples were dancing. Rollison looked about the room swiftly, and as he expected, saw Tips and Florence sitting at a corner table. They appeared to be deep in conversation.

Rollison waited until his party was about to pass them, then gave a start of surprise.

‘Why, look who’s here!’

Katrina and Derek looked. Tips was leaning forward and talking earnestly to Florence. He did not appear to notice the newcomers.

Rollison was watching Katrina. He caught the momentary narrowing of her eyes, saw her lips part and then close tightly together. She looked blankly at Rollison.

‘I do not understand you,’ she said.

‘Friends of mine,’ said Rollison, ‘I thought you’d met them. But we won’t disturb them now.’ He took Katrina’s arm and went on to their own table, wondering why she had pretended not to recognise Tips. Derek appeared to have noticed nothing.

Rollison ordered champagne, but its sparkle did nothing to put new life into the others. Rather desperately he suggested that his guests should dance. They rose obediently.

Rollison realised, almost at once, that dancing was in Katrina’s blood. He was surprised that Derek partnered her so well, so unobtrusively, making her the real performer so that his sturdy darkness became only a foil. It was more than dancing; it was moving grace, flowing movements, fascinating, exciting. Rollison glanced swiftly about the room, where there were some thirty couples now, and most people were looking towards the dance floor: towards Katrina.

There was a hush over the room. The popping of a champagne cork, the tinkle of glass and cutlery, came only rarely, and seemed an offence. There was a haunting loveliness about the music, and Katrina reacted as if it were being played only for her.

Katrina and Derek, dancing; in utter and complete unison.Rollison forgot the rest of the diners, forgot even Tips and Florence, as he watched Katrina. Sometimes he caught a glimpse of her expression, seeing in it the first real happiness he had seen in her face.

It went on: there seemed no reason why it should end; then suddenly the music stopped. The magic was over, the spell broken.

Near Rollison, someone said: ‘Marvellous!’

Every eye was turned towards their table, even Tips and Florence had come out of their own absorption, and been caught up in the general enchantment. Tips immediately stood up, and Rollison, murmuring excuses

to Katrina and Derek, went over to the other table.

Florence's bright eyes kindled at the sight of him.

'Hallo, Rolly! I thought I'd never be able to look you in the face again!'

'Guilty conscience?' asked Rollison, lightly. 'Hallo, Tips, You've found the best spot in London.'

'It certainly seems like it,' said Tips affably. 'How are you?'

'Recovering, though with less speed than I would like.'

'You look well enough,' said Florence heartlessly. 'But Rolly, *was* that Katrina Morral? What superb dancing!'

'A romantic performance,' Tips said, with a faint smile. 'She was certainly good, though.'

'I feel that I daren't dance again tonight,' Florence exclaimed.

'Unfortunately, with this leg, you're safe from me,' said Rollison with a grin, 'or I'd take you up on such a provocative remark.'

He saw the light sparkling from the ring on her engagement finger, and was surprised that things had gone so far between these two; but he could see from Florence's expression that it was an occasion of some importance; she was bubbling over with delight, and could not wholly conceal it. He looked for the brooch which Sheila had mentioned, but it was half-concealed in a fold of her dress, and he could not see it clearly.

'Oh, do *look!'* whispered Florence, her gaze caught by something happening behind Rollison.

He turned. A tiny pageboy, resplendent in uniform, gleaming buttons and white kid gloves, was walking towards Katrina. He was carrying a huge basket of flowers. The scent from them reached Rollison as he stood watching.

'How sweet!' said Florence, with a gusty sigh.

'Romance is evidently in the air,' Rollison murmured.

The pageboy stopped in front of Katrina, bowed, and then put the flowers on the table before her.

'A fitting tribute,' Rollison murmured, his eyes kindling. 'I wonder who sent them?'

'She's found a card,' Florence said excitedly. She was only one of a great many who were smiling their approval at the charming interlude. Katrina was opening an envelope, looking young and happy, her customary gravity quite gone. Derek, too, had caught the spirit of the occasion, and was bending towards her eagerly.

Rollison hardly saw anything of that.

He was staring at Flo's brooch, visible now that she was watching the Morrals. Tips, gazing at Katrina, did not see what had caught Rollison's attention.

The cluster of diamonds which formed the brooch was one of the clusters from the stolen relics; Rollison was prepared to swear to it. He had memorised the jewels too thoroughly to be wrong.

He looked away, to find Tips staring at him with an odd expression in his eyes.

Chapter Fourteen

A Basket of Flowers

'She is *really* beautiful,' said Florence handsomely, as she turned her glance away from Katrina.

Rollison put out a hand and touched the brooch.

'It's a night for beautiful things,' he said, 'I've never seen anything more lovely than this. I haven't been able to keep my eyes off it since I saw it.'

'So I've noticed,' said Tips.

'Do you really like it?' asked Florence, immediately enthusiastic. 'It is wonderful, I adore it. And—'

'Not yet!' muttered Tips. His voice was low. Nevertheless it held a note of command.

Rollison had seen Florence move her left hand, as if to show her ring and to tell him of her engagement; and now she paused. For a moment she and Tips exchanged glances, and Rollison thought that Florence was momentarily scared, as if she had detected in Tips something she had not encountered before, something which was a shock as well as a surprise.

'And I love beautiful jewellery,' she amended. 'Tips gave it to me for my birthday.'

'And when were you twenty-one?' asked Rollison.

'Last Thursday!'

'All very interesting,' said Tips, 'but I think your friends are calling you, Rollison.' He seemed a little more curt than usual, although he added: 'Shall we see you again soon?'

'It wouldn't surprise me,' said Rollison, and, patting Florence's hand, he returned to Katrina and Derek.

The spell of the dancing was still upon them. Here was a new and different Katrina; a creature of light as well as loveliness; for the first time Rollison heard her laugh. She welcomed him with a glowing smile, and pointed to the flowers.

'Are they not wonderful?'

'Yes, and well-deserved,' said Rollison.

'Thank you, Cousin Richard! Derek and I wished to say how glad we are that you brought us here!'

'Splendid!' said Rollison, 'and you have been the sensation of the evening. Was there a note in the flowers?'

'Yes – look. It says: *Thank you for the magic of your dancing.*'

She handed the envelope to him; it was unaddressed. He opened it and took out a card. The writing was in red ink. Into Rollison's mind there sprang a memory of the threatening letters, the first move to prevent anyone from trying to heal the breach between Derek and Katrina. The red ink on the envelope was clear in his mind's eye. Whoever had tried to warn Old

Glory off had failed, and then resorted to attempted murder. Red ink alone could be a coincidence, but *the handwriting was the same.*

The next moment he had sprung to his feet. Snatching the flowers from the table he hurried across the room. Katrina stared after him in astonishment. Derek pushed his chair back, got up and took a step towards him, but stopped. Couples dancing moved hurriedly aside, and Rollison elbowed one man away from him, intent only on getting out of the room.

It was the kind of bold, imaginative trick which had featured so often in the case. Someone whose mind worked very quickly was behind it. Lorne? More likely the man who had taken the photographs from the flat, but Lorne might have bought the flowers, on instruction.

Rollison strode out, and almost cannoned into the head waiter.

'Is there an empty room near here?' Rollison demanded.

'I don't quite understand—'

'An empty room,' said Rollison. 'These might go off.'

'Go off—' echoed the head waiter, and then, impressed by Rollison's expression as much as his words, he nodded. 'This way,' he said, and turned and led the way along a narrow passage, with Rollison only a step behind him. He pushed open a door and stood aside. Rollison went into a large, barely- furnished room.

He put the basket of flowers on the table, and drew back.

'Hadn't you better come out, sir?' asked the head waiter, nervously.

'Yes,' said Rollison, 'but I don't want these touched. Can you lock the door?'

'If you seriously think they might "go off",' said the other, anxiously, 'ought they not to be removed by the police?' He paused, watching Rollison who was staring at the flowers, and added: 'You do mean that you think they might explode, don't you?'

'It's possible,' said Rollison, 'but it could be a more subtle trick than that. Telephone Scotland Yard, find out where Superintendent Grice is, and ask him to come here as soon as he can. If I've left, tell him exactly what happened – that's if you don't mind,' he added with a quick smile.

'Of course not, Mr Rollison.'

The waiter locked the door, and they walked back towards the Oak Room. 'You have a good memory for faces,' Rollison said. 'A tall, fair-haired man with exceptional physique, possibly with a beard – have you seen one about?'

'I'm quite sure that I have not,' said the head waiter.

'Who sent the flowers?'

'I'm afraid I don't know,' said the head waiter. 'I was told that a bouquet had been sent upstairs, but it is not unusual.'

'Let us find the pageboy who took them up,' said Rollison.

The pageboy was a cherubic-looking youth, obviously selected by *Kundle's* because of his air of round-eyed innocence. He had been in the hall when a gentleman had come downstairs, bought the flowers, written the card and told him to take them to the only lady in red in the Oak Room. As far as the

lad remembered, he was a dark-haired man; yes, he was tall, a very handsome-looking gentleman indeed.

'Did he use a fountain pen?' asked Rollison.

'Yes, sir, I remember seeing that.'

'Well done,' said Rollison. 'Now, who else saw him?'

They were then in the manager's room, and the manager himself, who was most anxious to be helpful but was obviously nervous about the whole situation, sent the pageboy out to bring in the flower seller. Petite and self-assured, she clearly remembered the man who had bought the basket of flowers, because he had taken them into a writing-booth, which led off the entrance hall, and been inside for a few minutes.

'So you didn't see him write,' said Rollison.

'No, sir.'

'Did he use a fountain pen?' asked Rollison, thinking of the round-eyed page and wondered whether the lad had called too freely on his imagination.

'Oh yes, I saw him take out a fountain pen, sir,' said the girl.

'Good!' said Rollison. 'And what was he like?'

'He was a very handsome gentleman, tall and dark,' said the girl. 'He has been here on several evenings, sir,'

'Alone?' asked Rollison.

'Oh no, sir.'

'Always with the same companion?'

'Yes, sir, always the same lady.'

'Do you know his name?'

'I'm afraid not, sir.' The girl looked at the manager for a moment, and then, as if encouraged, went on: 'I think I know his first name, sir, the lady often used it. It was an unusual name – Cedric.'

'Ah!' exclaimed Rollison in high delight. 'Now do you remember the lady's name?'

'He usually called her "darling",' said the girl, apologetically. 'I don't remember him using any other.'

'That isn't unusual,' said the manager, unnecessarily.

'No,' said Rollison drily. 'What was she like?'

'*Very* pretty, sir. Tall and fair – well, fairish.'

The girl was unable to give him more information, except that she knew the couple had not been there every night. She could not remember which nights they had missed, but suggested that the attendant in the gentleman's cloakroom might be able to help.

'Tell Carter to come in here,' said the manager, rather desperately. He turned to Rollison. 'You haven't forgotten the possible danger from the flowers, Mr Rollison, have you?'

'No,' said Rollison, 'but we must wait for the police. Bright girl, the flower seller,' he added, 'in fact the whole staff is very good.'

A momentary gleam of satisfaction crossed the manager's wintery expression.

‘I select them personally,’ he murmured.

‘Congratulations!’ said Rollison.

The cloakroom attendant, a grey-haired, dignified-looking man in a spotless white suit, came in, faced the manager, and asked in a Shakespearian voice how he could be of assistance. He was, undoubtedly, a ‘character’; Rollison placed him as a small-part actor who found *Kundle’s* more remunerative than provincial theatres with a walking on part.

He had no difficulty in remembering ‘Cedric’.

‘A remarkably finely-built, good-looking gentleman, sir,’ he said, ‘and most generous, if I may say so.’

‘Do you know his name?’ asked Rollison

‘I regret, sir, that I do not.’

‘Can you remember the occasions when he came here with his lady friend?’

‘Would it be of equal assistance, sir, if I told you when he did *not* come?’ Keen blue eyes behind bushy eyebrows were turned intently on the Toff.

‘Certainly it would, very much so,’ Rollison told him.

‘Then, sir, he was not here on the day of your birthday party, of that I am *quite* sure.’

‘My party?’

‘Of which I read in the morning newspapers on the subsequent day,’ said Carter, smoothly, ‘and I would like to add my felicitations, sir.’ He bowed. ‘He was here the evening before that and the evening after that when, if I may say so, his companion seemed somewhat jaded, as if she had suffered some acute disappointment.’

‘Go on,’ said Rollison.

‘He was here, with the lady, one night,’ said Carter, ‘and then he did not come again until the night before last. He was also here last night and, of course, tonight, and he left soon after he sent the flowers to the lady in red,’

‘With his companion?’

‘Yes, sir.’

By then the manager had finished telephoning his staff for any further information. It appeared that the man known only as Cedric had been coming to the restaurant over a period of three or four months, not always with the same companion until recently.

So Rollison wanted to know whether any of the staff could describe his earlier companions.

He was not surprised that the manager was showing signs of nervous impatience; the man was obviously picturing the basket of flowers exploding and a room being ruined, and he began to fidget. Then Grice came in. The manager at once became voluble. He must insist, he really must insist, though willing to give every possible assistance to the police, that the flowers be removed from the premises *immediately*.

‘That’s fair enough,’ said Grice.

The manager heaved a sigh of relief.

‘I appreciate your consideration very much indeed, Superintendent. I will

have you escorted to the room.'

'It's all right,' said Rollison. 'I know the way.'

He led Grice up the stairs and along the passage, well aware that they were being eyed by lurking members of the staff eager for every crumb of sensation. Grice asked questions, Rollison answered them briefly, and they reached the door of the room.

'After you, Rolly,' said Grice, drily.

'A policeman with the jitters?' murmured Rollison, opening the door.

'The flowers are probably quite harmless,' said Grice confidently.

'A very elastic little word, "probably",' said Rollison as they went inside.

There the flowers were, fresh, beautiful and undisturbed, and it did not seem possible that there could be danger in their fragile petals. Even Rollison had doubts about it. Grice went forward, lifted the basket cautiously, and held it to his ear.

'No *tick-tick-tick* of an infernal machine,' said Rollison. 'I've listened for that.'

'Do modern infernal machines tick?' asked Grice, lightly. 'I—'

The pageboy appeared in the doorway.

'Mr Rollison, sir, there's a gentleman asking for you, and he says it's urgent.'

'Where is he?' asked Rollison.

'Waiting at the end of the passage, sir,' said the lad.

Rollison glanced along the passage, curiously. Derek was standing there, his hands thrust deep in his pockets. At sight of Rollison he took a step forward.

Grice, meanwhile, took a flower from the basket, then another. The third one came with difficulty. As it left the basket there was a flash and a loud explosion. Grice fell back with a cry, while the blast hurled the boy and the two men crashing to the ground.

Chapter Fifteen

Search for Cedric

Only Grice was hurt.

He was so badly injured that there seemed little hope that he would live. Shocked members of the staff helped Rollison to carry him downstairs, where he was taken into a small room until an ambulance and a doctor arrived. The doctor came first and was non-committal. He said briefly that he could do little until the patient was in hospital. The manager, acting swiftly, prevented any of the diners from entering the hall until Grice was taken away, but a rumour of the accident spread quickly, reached the Oak Room where Tips and Florence were still dancing, and brought Tips hurrying into the hall. He found Rollison talking to a constable.

'Good Lord!' exclaimed Tips. 'Someone told me you were hurt.'

'Not me – Superintendent Grice,' Rollison said briefly.

'Oh. Bad show.'

'Bad show,' echoed Rollison, and added savagely: 'Not so bad as it will be for—' He broke off abruptly, and turned away. Tips shrugged his shoulders and asked whether he could help.

'Not now, thanks,' said Rollison, curtly.

He watched Tips ambling away, wondering whether he were right to assume that he knew where the jewels in the brooch had come from.

The disaster had completely subdued the manager. An Inspector Hill had been sent from Scotland Yard. He looked tired and anxious as he began an exhaustive interrogation of the staff. The fact that one of his own colleagues had been hurt, had naturally affected him deeply.

Rollison went to the telephone and rang up the Westminster Hospital. He was told that there was no change in Grice's condition. Moodily, he replaced the receiver.

'I am so very sorry,' said the manager.

'Yes,' said Rollison. He looked bleakly at the door, and showed only mild interest when Derek appeared.

'How is he?' asked Derek.

'No report yet.'

'Any hope?'

'I don't know.'

Derek said: 'Words aren't much use. If it hadn't been for you, Katrina—' He broke off.

Rollison said more gently: 'Yes, of course, Derek. That's something to be glad about. How is Katrina?'

'As she was before,' said Derek. The manager melted tactfully away, as he went on passionately: 'For the first time since this damnable business started, I thought tonight that she was coming back to her real self. You *saw*

her! She used to be always like that, and now—'

'It will come back,' Rollison said. 'You know she is terribly afraid, don't you?'

Derek said heavily: 'I know that there's something very seriously wrong.'

Rollison said: 'Katrina knows that she is in danger, that at any time she might be killed. She is never safe, and after tonight—' He broke off with a shrug. 'Can you be surprised if she just withdraws into herself? She must be terrified.'

Derek said passionately: 'If only she would tell me what the trouble is!'

'She will, one day,' said Rollison, feeling useless. 'Where is she now?'

'Still at the table.'

'You'd better go to her,' said Rollison. 'And after this, she'll have to be watched carefully. You, too. Go back to her now.'

Derek went off, his shoulders hunched. Rollison watched him, his expression set and hard.

In spite of the obvious danger to Katrina, in spite of the discovery that Lorne often appeared as a dark-haired man, and not the blond whom Rollison knew, in spite of the discovery of Florence's brooch and his suspicions of Tips, there was only one over-ruling thought in his mind: how was Grice?

Grice's injury was his, Rollison's, fault.

If he had made sure that Grice had not touched the flowers, it would not have happened. He had been convinced that the flowers were dangerous. From the moment he had seen the handwriting in red he had been sure of it; but he had let Grice play the fool. It was useless to tell himself that Grice was a responsible person who should have known better.

It was *his* fault.

'Is there anything else I can do, Mr Rollison?' asked the manager, approaching him with some diffidence. 'I will gladly do anything, anything at all.'

'You're very good,' said Rollison. 'I ought to be doing more myself.' He looked down at the odd slips of paper on which he had taken notes of the information he had obtained from the pageboy, the flower seller and Carter. Talking to himself, he began to put them in some sort of order, and by checking one statement against another he found that it was possible to be reasonably certain when Cedric Lorne had been at *Kundle's.* There was the notable fact that he had not, of course, been there on the night of the party; nor on two other nights, earlier that week.

One of the notes caught his attention particularly:

> *Lorne's companion under the weather day after party. Very pretty woman.*

He read it again and again, because it interested him more than any of the others. It was as if the words were trying to convey a hidden meaning, but his mind was too confused to grasp it. He kept seeing a mental picture of

Grice reeling back from the flowers, and the dreadful sight of his face.

He moved suddenly, stretching across the manager, who leaned back, startled. He lifted the telephone, and there was a different expression in his eyes; it was as if he had returned to life. He dialled his own number, and when Jolly answered, he said: 'Call Mrs Gregory – Sheila Gregory – Jolly, and ask her what nights Miss Henderson was staying with her.'

'It is rather late, sir, a little after one o'clock,' suggested Jolly primly. 'Shall I risk getting Mrs Gregory out of bed?'

'Risk anything,' said Rollison.

'Has anything gone *wrong,* sir?' asked Jolly, in alarm.

'Yes. Grice is badly injured. Find those dates, Jolly.'

'At once!' said Jolly.

'And then tell the Yard I may want help at Mary Henderson's flat,' said Rollison. He replaced the receiver, settled his bill, and hurried downstairs. A police-sergeant was in the hall, and two or three parties were leaving the restaurant. The sergeant, on Rollison's suggestion, was there to watch and to follow Tips and Florence, so obviously they had not left yet.

'Mr and Mrs Morral have gone, sir,' the sergeant told him, 'and Edwards has followed them.'

'Good,' said Rollison. He nodded briefly and strode out of the hotel.

There were several taxis waiting outside. Rollison hailed one of them.

'Evercourt Mansions, Chelsea, second entrance. And move fast.'

'Right, sir.'

In a little over ten minutes, Rollison was outside Mary Henderson's flat. Telling the cabby to wait, he hurried into the foyer. A night porter looked up, but Rollison did not wait to speak to him. Mary's flat was on the second floor, and he had been there several times. Now as he went along the passage, he saw a light shining through the fanlight above her door.

He stood outside, listening, but could hear nothing.

He examined the lock of the door; it was a Yale, which could only be opened with great difficulty. He felt an overpowering desire to break in and find out whether Mary was on her own, or whether Lorne was with her. If it was she who had been Lorne's companion recently, then she had been at *Kundle's* that night.

He looked up at the fanlight; it was ajar.

Further along the passage was a chair. He brought it to the door, climbed up, and found that he could reach the fanlight, which opened easily turning on hinges which were set near the ceiling. He pushed it to its widest, and found that it was self-locking. He hoisted himself up further, leaning through into the hall of the flat.

The doors surrounding it were closed, but he could now hear voices.

He squeezed himself further through the fanlight and hung down until he could touch the door-knob; he pushed it back, and the door opened.

He heard the whine of the lift and dropped back into the passage. Two people passed. He waited until all was quiet again, and then slipped into

Mary's flat, closing the door without a sound.

He could hear voices, a man's and a woman's. He thought they were arguing. He went towards the door softly, and turned the handle.

There was no sound.

He pushed the door open an inch, and Mary's voice came clearly: 'Of course you would say that, but—'

'Darling, *don't* be so obstinate.'

Rollison felt a surge of excitement, for the voice was Cedric Lorne's.

'Surely you and I understand each other,' it went on.

'That's all very well, but when you behave like that, what else can I think?'

'I *must* attend to business,' Lorne said.

'Business!'

Rollison opened the door a little wider, and walked into the room. The couple were sitting on a sofa, Mary wearing a sulky expression, Lorne holding her hands and peering into her face.

She looked up, and saw Rollison.

She screamed and jumped to her feet, flinging Lorne's hands aside.

'Hallo,' said Rollison.

He watched Lorne stiffen. The man turned his head, but did not panic. He stood up very slowly, while Mary pressed herself against the sofa back, staring wide-eyed at Rollison, her breath coming in quick, shallow gasps. Apart from that there was no sound in the room.

Lorne said at last: 'How did you get in?'

'Does that matter?' asked Rollison.

'Well, yes, I think it does. Have you a key?' Lorne turned on Mary, with a movement so swift that it took Rollison by surprise. There was a hoarse rasp in his voice as he spat out: 'Did you do this, you—'

'Stop that!' cried Rollison, but although he leapt across the room he was not in time to prevent Lorne from driving his fist into Mary's face, a blow delivered with such vicious strength that the girl sagged sideways. Lorne kicked out at Rollison, then picked up a cushion and flung it at him. Momentarily blinded, Rollison was not in time to prevent Lorne lifting a heavy book-end from a nearby table, and bringing it down with a sickening crash on Mary's head.

Rollison swept the cushion aside, gasping for breath, and flung himself on Lorne; but the man struck out with both fists

in a furious onslaught. One blow caught Rollison in the side of the neck, a kick landed in his groin. He backed away, trying to keep upright, trying to stand between Lorne and the door, but Lorne was on him again in a wild fury, using his strength with unbridled violence, driving Rollison against the wall, intent on murder. He drove two punches to Rollison's chin; Rollison's head hit the wall with a resounding crack, and tears of pain filled his eyes. He could not see, and was conscious only of pain, of the mist in front of his eyes, and the realisation that Lorne had gone berserk.

Lorne swung round, picked up the book-end, and again raised it above his

head. Rollison did not see the gesture, but he sensed the imminence of the danger and wrenched himself free.

It was very quiet. Only the panting of the men could be heard. Mary lay inert; the top of her head crushed in.

Lorne hurled himself forward again.

Rollison shot out a leg, and Lorne, not expecting so simple a move, tripped over it. Had he been fresh, Rollison could have gone in and finished it then, but he was out of breath, and the pain in his head and in his stomach was agonising.

Suddenly he realised that they were not alone, that there was a third man present. Through the red mists he saw the little man with a hooked nose. He held a gun.

The little man said: 'Come on, Lorne.' Nothing else, nothing to Rollison.

The voice came again: *'Come on, damn you!'*

Lorne pointed a trembling hand at Rollison, and croaked: 'We can't leave – him.'

The little man said: 'The police are outside.'

Lorne took a step forward, staggered, and nearly fell. Rollison moved forward, but his head was swimming and he could barely see.

There was a shuffle of sound; then the door closed.

Chapter Sixteen

Bleak Morning

Rollison opened his eyes cautiously. His head was aching badly, and he did not dare to move it. He closed his eyes again, carrying a picture of a billowing curtain and feeling the wind on his face; then suddenly, superimposed upon the curtain, was Grice's face as he had reeled back from the basket of flowers.

'Jolly!' he croaked.

The name hardly seemed to be uttered before Jolly was there.

'Good morning, sir.'

'Grice?'

'His condition is the same as when you inquired last night, sir, and I have arranged with Scotland Yard to telephone immediately there is any change.'

'Good,' said Rollison. 'I'll have some tea.'

'Is it wise to move just yet?' asked Jolly, anxiously. 'You've taken rather a bashing – I mean, a certain amount of violence has been used. No doubt on both sides,' conceded Jolly tactfully.

'Not for the first time,' said Rollison grimly. 'No, no tea. I'll get up.'

'In that case I'll bring something a little stronger than tea,' Jolly told him, 'and I will not be many minutes, sir.'

When Jolly returned, Rollison was asleep again. He slept for nearly two hours, and when next he opened his eyes, his head felt clearer and he sat up without discomfort. He felt his throat and neck experimentally. Some parts of it he could touch, some he could not.

'I'm very glad you are feeling better, sir,' said Jolly. 'You had dropped off again when I returned, and I thought it wiser not to disturb you. Mr Grice is no worse, in fact there is some indication of a change for the better.'

'Thank God for that!' said Rollison, fervently.

'Mr Tippets rang up several times, sir, and said that he was anxious to see you as soon as possible. I asked him to come at two o'clock. It is now nearly eleven.'

'Did he say what he wanted?'

'No, sir, but he said you would know.'

'I see. What about Mr Morral?'

'I telephoned him at ten o'clock,' said Jolly, 'and he had nothing to report, sir, he said that—er—the situation is unchanged.'

'Well, it couldn't be much worse,' said Rollison.

'As you say, sir,' said Jolly suavely. 'I have arranged for a masseur to be here at twelve o'clock, perhaps you would like to dress after he has been.'

'A masseur for what?' asked Rollison.

'Your neck, sir, and I think it would be wise to have a little massage for your knee and ankle, you tried them rather severely last night. A soft, boiled

egg is on its way, sir.'

A little before twelve o'clock the masseur came, and for a while Rollison's neck was even more painful; but soon after the man had gone he was feeling easier and quite clear-headed. His spirits were low; but that was less important than the feeling of grim ruthlessness with which he regarded the future of this case.

At a quarter to one, dressed in flannels and a Norfolk jacket, he went into the kitchen, where Jolly was hovering over a casserole. Rollison sniffed appreciatively, and Jolly said that lunch would be ready at one-fifteen.

'Lay the table for two,' said Rollison. 'I want to talk to you. I'll go out for a breath of fresh air first.'

The morning was bleak, like Rollison's thoughts, but the blustering wind held no more chilliness than his own reflections. London had a savage, embattled air that left no mark on Rollison, carefully going over in his mind all that had happened, testing each thing, trying to find its weakness or its strength. That Lorne was not the leader of the people who were still safe from the police was now established. The little man with the hooked nose appeared to be more important, though he was not a killer for killing's sake, while Lorne was.

Rollison tried to blot out his last view of Mary Henderson. She had been killed instantaneously: the inquest would be held on the following day, and the verdict would be murder against Lorne.

Where *was* Lorne?

Why had he killed her? Had it been in a fit of rage because he thought she had betrayed him? Or had it been just an outlet for the wild fury which took hold of him and turned him into a beast? Or had he feared that she would talk, and so had killed her deliberately, only pretending to go berserk?

'I doubt that,' said Rollison, aloud.

He was back at the flat promptly at one-fifteen, and Jolly immediately brought in the *chicken en casserole.* Rollison ate with relish, and for the first part of the meal said very little. Then Jolly produced a strawberry flan, topped with cream, and Rollison said with a crooked smile: 'A celebration, Jolly?'

'Well, sir, you could so easily have come out of it in a worse state, if indeed, you came out of it at all. I thought an exceptionally good lunch might be in order.'

'I'm touched,' said Rollison humbly. 'Well, did I tell you anything coherent last night?'

'I think that you gave me a fairly accurate summary of the situation, sir,' said Jolly. 'That Lorne has known Mary Henderson for some time, and that she gave him some assistance, for which she was very poorly rewarded. It follows, sir, that her curious manifestation of low spirits was a pretence, doesn't it?'

'Yes. Other things also follow. She came here after I had stolen Lorne's

wallet to give someone else the opportunity to get it back. I was completely taken in.'

'Anyone would have been,' murmured Jolly.

'I doubt it. Presumably she brought Lorne to the party.'

'I did take the liberty of speaking to Mr Morral on the telephone about that,' said Jolly, 'and he questioned Mrs Morral, who denies it was she who invited him. She was surprised and upset to see him, I understand.'

'Yes. I should have made sure of that before. Sweet, pretty Mary!' Rollison said bitterly. 'I was too late, Jolly. I've been too late in seeing the obvious in all these things.'

'I doubt if anything has been very obvious so far, sir,' said Jolly, 'and I doubt whether anyone would so quickly have realised that Lorne's companion at *Kundle's* was Mary Henderson.'

'I should have taken the police with me,' Rollison said.

'Hindsight, sir, can be very illuminating,' murmured Jolly judicially.

'Well, we haven't made much headway,' Rollison declared, finishing the flan. 'We go from bad to worse. When I think of Grice—'

'He was very foolish indeed to ignore your warnings, sir,' said Jolly, 'and you cannot blame yourself for that. You told me last night that he would not take the matter of the flowers seriously, and it was entirely his own fault. And there is another thing which you must not overlook, sir. Had you not removed those flowers, the explosion might have occurred in the Oak Room. That would have brought distress and disaster to many, including Mrs Morral. You have no cause to reproach yourself.'

'I wish I thought so,' said Rollison. 'Warning Grice wasn't enough. If I'd made myself unpleasant he would have taken notice. He always does.'

'Plastic surgery is a miraculous thing,' said Jolly, a little ponderously, 'and I understand that there was no serious injury. Mercifully, his eyes were spared. I do hope you will not unduly distress yourself.'

'Mary Henderson is dead,' said Rollison bluntly.

'You can hardly be blamed because Lorne had a brainstorm,' said Jolly.

'Was it a brainstorm? Nothing in this affair suggests that it's being directed by men who suddenly take leave of their senses. It's being done coolly, deliberately, with devilish thoroughness, and it isn't over yet. They still want to kill Katrina Morral.'

'Who is under constant police surveillance.'

'That isn't enough,' said Rollison, and then he laughed mirthlessly at Jolly's expression. 'You're probably right,' he added, 'I am being a Jeremiah over this. What time is Mr Tippets coming?'

'At two o'clock, sir, in a little over ten minutes. I will get the coffee now.'

Tips arrived at five past two. He came into the room, a well-knit, impressive-looking young man, nodded to Rollison and said 'hallo', but did not offer to shake hands. He sat down in an easy chair, settled himself comfortably, refused coffee, and then surprised Rollison by the twinkle in his eye.

'Thinking of me as the nigger in the woodpile?' he asked.

‘Not yet,’ said Rollison.

‘Why not be frank?’ asked Tips. ‘That brooch. It meant something to you. What?’

‘Can’t you guess?’ asked Rollison.

‘Never any good at riddles, let’s stick to facts,’ said Tips. ‘Jewels have been stolen – right? Well, do you think the brooch was made up of some of those jewels?’

‘Yes,’ declared Rollison bluntly.

‘Pity,’ said Tips. Rollison made no comment, and Tips went on: ‘Pity you didn’t say what you thought last night. About the jewels, I mean. You see, I bought them from Mary Henderson.’

‘Good lord!’

‘Good lord indeed,’ said Tips with a grin. ‘But does the expression mask withering scorn? You need not believe me. Easy enough for me to say that I bought the cluster from a girl who is dead. Immediately I read the news this morning, I tried to come to see you, but your man proved more than a little obstructive.’

‘I wasn’t in a fit state to see anyone this morning,’ said Rollison. ‘Can you offer proof that you bought them from Mary?’

‘No,’ said Tips, briefly.

‘Then the police will be sceptical, even if I’m not.’

‘But you are, so that makes no odds. Who’s the policeman to see, now that Grice is out of action? How *is* Grice?’

‘He may pull through.’

‘Very glad to hear it,’ said Tips. ‘Well, who’s the Johnnie to see?’ He put his hand into his waistcoat pocket, and brought out a small leather case. ‘Here is the exhibit,’ he said, and handed it to Rollison. ‘Borrowed it from Florence. Told her the whole story. Willing co-operation, but she hopes she will get it back.’

Rollison opened the case.

The brooch lay against black velvet, and even in that dull light the beauty and brilliance seemed to bring brightness into the room. There were four diamonds, each set in a tiny platinum leaf, and the setting itself was a work of great beauty. Rollison studied it for some time, turning it over and looking at the back. After a while Tips said: ‘Well, who *is* the policeman to see? Not the heavy-footed chap who has been following me about since last night, I hope.’

‘No,’ said Rollison, ‘and I don’t know who has taken over the case yet. I’m expecting to be invited to the Yard at any time.’

‘Glad to come,’ said Tips. ‘I want to get this settled.’

‘Did you buy the brooch as it is, or did you buy the diamonds and have them reset?’

‘I bought it just as it is.’

‘And the price?’

‘Two thousand guineas,’ Tips said, calmly. ‘Expensive present, of course, but I’m not short of money. Inherited wealth. What is it worth?’

‘Five thousand,’ said Rollison, ‘and that would be on the wholesale market, in the open market it would fetch nearly twice as much. You got a bargain.’

‘Meaning, I ought to have known that it was worth much more, and should have been suspicious,’ said Tips. ‘Well, I didn’t know. Bought girls a few baubles, but never anything on the grand scale before. Never met a girl like Florence before.’ The faint gleam of humour showed in his eyes again. ‘I seem to be in for a sticky time, don’t I? As a matter of fact I’ve bought other pieces of finery from Mary. She did a certain amount of trade abroad too, I fancy.’

‘Are you sure of that?’ asked Rollison, his interest quickening. He put the brooch down and gave Tips his whole attention.

Tips crossed his legs and took out a gold cigarette case.

‘Sure enough,’ he answered, ‘and here’s a sample.’ He handed it to Rollison, who looked at it with cursory interest and handed it back. ‘Mary said that her parents were in that line. Gold, silver, jewels. No reason to disbelieve her. Asked her before your party whether she could find me something exceptional, and she promised. This brooch turned up two days after the jewel robbery, but you can hardly blame me for not thinking it had anything to do with that, can you?’ He smiled again, and pressed the cigarette case, to open it. *‘Can* you?’ he repeated, and leaned forward as it opened. ‘Cigarette?’ As he finished, he winced and shook his hand. ‘That’s odd,’ he said, ‘something pricked me.’

Rollison stared at Tips’ thumb, and the tiny spot of blood that already showed; and then he saw a needle, fastened inside the case between the cigarettes.

Chapter Seventeen

Hollow Needle

For a couple of seconds they sat staring at the blood, Tips bewildered, Rollison fascinated by the needle. Then Rollison leapt to his feet. Seizing Tips by the arm he dragged him into the bathroom, yelling robustly for Jolly. He flipped open a first-aid box and took out a scalpel. He took Tips' wrist, turned the thumb upwards, seeing the blood smeared now, and then used the scalpel. Tips winced.

'Strong antiseptic at once, Jolly,' Rollison said as his man came into the bathroom, and then added to Tips: 'I'm sorry about that. Do you feel all right?'

'Good Lord, yes!'

'I don't think you would have, for long,' said Rollison. 'I hope I didn't overdo it. You took it well.'

'You're no fool,' said Tips. 'Oddly enough, I trust you. Pity it isn't reciprocated!'

'Perhaps it will be,' said Rollison. 'I'll leave you to Jolly for a minute.'

He went into the other room and picked up the open cigarette case. It was filled with cigarettes. The needle had been cunningly placed and fastened down by a piece of sticking plaster. The tip just showed beyond the fastening clip. Rollison took a pair of tweezers from a drawer in his desk, pulled off the sticking plaster, and extracted the needle. Then he held it under a magnifying-glass, examined it intently for several minutes, whistling faintly under his breath.

Tips came in, with his thumb neatly bandaged.

'Your man knows all about first-aid,' he said, appreciatively. 'Thanks, Jolly.'

'That is perfectly all right, sir,' said Jolly, and turned towards the kitchen.

'Don't go,' Rollison said to him. 'Have a look at this.' He pointed to the needle, and Jolly, also using the tweezers, examined it. He looked up, and said without expression: 'I think it is a hollow needle, sir.'

'It is,' said Rollison. He looked thoughtfully at Tips, and asked: 'How does the thumb feel?'

'It's throbbing a bit.'

'Well, yes, that's to be expected, but I don't think any poison could have got through in the time,' said Rollison, 'but we'd better make sure. Take the needle to Professor Lowry's laboratory, Jolly, ask for an immediate analysis of the contents and find out its antidote. You can tell the Professor exactly what has been done so far.'

'Immediately, sir,' said Jolly.

Tips raised one eyebrow as Jolly left the room, and said in a thoughtful voice: 'Do you think they tried to kill me?'

‘Of course I think they tried to kill you,’ said Rollison, and added with a bland smile: ‘Unless, of course, you filled the needle with water and tried to impress me with the fact that you are a victim! In which case Professor Lowry will report that it is only water, and you will immediately become high on the list of suspects.’

Tips grinned.

‘What a mind you’ve got! Well, I *didn’t* put the needle in there, I assure you. And I hope most sincerely that I’m not poisoned!’

‘I expect you do,’ said Rollison, drily. ‘Sit down, and relax. Would you like a drink?’

‘No thanks,’ said Tips. ‘I don’t drink much. I don’t smoke much either, luckily. If I’d opened that case in the street it would probably have been curtains for me!’ He wrinkled his forehead. ‘I’m trying to think who could have fixed the needle there.’

‘When did you fill the case?’

‘Immediately after lunch.’

‘Where did you lunch?’

‘*Kundle’s.*’

‘Oh,’ said Rollison, thoughtfully. ‘Were you alone?’

‘Good Lord, no! Florence was with me. She had an appointment – hairdresser, I think – and left about a quarter to two. I bought some cigarettes, filled the case, and went to have a wash.’

‘At *Kundle’s?’* asked Rollison, quickly.

‘Yes. Cloakroom. Took my coat off,’ said Tips. ‘I wasn’t there more than ten minutes, and wouldn’t have been that long, only the attendant was very talkative. Nothing surprising in that. He’s got the mien and manner of a bishop.’

‘Where did you leave your coat?’ asked Rollison, crossing the room and lifting the telephone receiver. He dialled a number as Tips told him that he had left the coat in an outer room. He was speaking very quietly, and Rollison had the impression that he was now greatly worried; perhaps his thumb was growing more painful.

The operator at Scotland Yard answered Rollison, who asked for Inspector Hill and suggested that the cloakroom attendant at *Kundle’s* should be watched. Hill said, gloomily, that it seemed to him that every man in London was being watched, but they were not getting any further. He seemed disposed to talk, but Rollison apologised for being in a hurry, and rang off.

Tips was leaning back in his chair with his eyes closed.

‘Are you all right?’ Rollison asked, sharply.

‘Oh, yes,’ said Tips, opening his eyes. He looked a little pale, and he raised his hand. ‘This is hurting like the very devil, though. When will you hear from that Professor chap?’

‘Jolly won’t let him lose any time,’ Rollison said, confidently, ‘and I don’t believe that the poison had time to do its work.’

‘I *hope* it didn’t,’ said Tips, and added: ‘I think I will have that drink.’

Rollison was pouring out a whisky when the telephone rang. He let it ring until he had given Tips the whisky-and-soda, and then heard Lady Gloria, who sounded a little impatient, on the other end of the line. She had called only to inquire about him, she said, and there was a note of reproof in her voice when she found that he was up. If he took her advice – which she was now long past believing he would – he would go to bed and stay there for at least forty-eight hours.

'Glory, dear,' said Rollison gently, 'I am thirty-seven, not seven or seventy-seven.'

'I see you are well enough to indulge in foolish witticisms,' said Lady Gloria, coldly.

'And I see that your conscience is troubling you just a tiny bit.'

'Richard!'

'To few can the success of their schemes have come so promptly,' said Rollison, sweetly. 'You wished to make me forget, dear Glory, and here am I forgetting everything but the murders or near-murders of my friends and acquaintances. No, no,' he said, hastily, 'of course it isn't your fault, but you must stop complaining because I am now doing exactly what you planned that I should do … *What?'*

'I said,' said Lady Gloria, 'that I think you ought to go away for a month.'

'Look here, you are all right, aren't you?' asked Rollison, earnestly. 'No giddy spells, or what not?'

'I am not subject to giddy spells or what not,' said Old Glory, 'but I am a sensible woman, and I know when a man has gone too far.'

'Too far, or not far enough?' asked Rollison.

His aunt did not reply. He waited for a moment, a little annoyed with himself because he had teased her, wondering how best he could assure her that he had not intended to sound malicious. Then he said sharply: 'Are you there, Glory?'

'Yes, I am still here,' said Lady Gloria. She was silent again, and Rollison felt anxious, for it was not like her to behave like this. At last she said, in a low-pitched voice: 'Rolly, will you for once take the advice of an old woman? One who really does wish you well.'

'I know you wish me well,' said Rollison.

'Then go away, my dear.'

'But Glory—'

'Go away!' cried Lady Gloria. 'If you don't, heaven *knows* what you'll discover! You've done all that anyone can reasonably expect of you, now go away, leave everything to the police. Will you, Rolly?'

After a pause, Rollison said: 'I'll think about it, Glory. I think I see what you mean. Goodbye.'

He rang off without another word, and stood staring at nothing.

'Bleak thoughts?' asked Tips.

'If you can call them thoughts, though the bleakness is there all right.'

'Can I help?'

'No, thanks,' said Rollison. 'You've run into enough trouble already. Any

more of it and you'll probably finish up like Grice or Mary Henderson.'

'I'm not worried by that possibility,' said Tips. 'Between you and me, I would like a stab at the beggar who put that needle in my cigarette case. Do you seriously think it was the attendant at *Kundle's* – I mean, the chap like a bishop?'

'It could have been someone at *Kundle's,'* said Rollison quietly. 'It could have been Florence.'

Tips banged down his glass and jumped to his feet. He was completely transformed. Rollison had never seen him moved before; now he was angry, not in a wild way like Lorne but furiously angry all the same. He strode across the room until he was face to face with Rollison.

'Take it back!'

'Now, steady—' began Rollison.

'Take it back, or I'll knock you down!'

After a long, tense pause, Rollison said with great deliberation: 'Tips, I am going to find out who is responsible for these crimes. I am going to consider you, Florence, my Aunt Gloria, my cousins Derek and Katrina – *every*one who might possibly have made any contribution, wittingly or unwittingly, to a most unpleasant business.' He paused, then went on: 'I can only assume, from your sudden reaction, that you know Florence had a chance to put the needle in the case,' Rollison went on. 'If she did, you will be a fool to try to conceal it. Well? Could she have done it?'

Tips stared at him, opened his lips, closed them again and then said in a harsh voice: 'She filled the case.'

'Were you there when she did it?'

'No, she took it away with her. But there's nothing unusual in that, Rollison. She had always filled it. She did so one night when I had run out of cigarettes, and you know how little things like that become a habit.' Tips was speaking earnestly now, as if he saw the real danger of Florence being suspected. 'I am quite sure that she would do nothing like that, she *can't* have done it!'

'She could have done,' said Rollison, 'but that doesn't mean that she did. Was that talk of Carter and the cloakroom all bunkum, to protect her?'

'Of course not. It happened.'

'And where is Florence now?'

'At her hairdresser's, as I told you,' said Tips.

Rollison stood silent for a moment, moving slowly up and down on his toes. Odd thoughts flashed into his mind and out again, Tips' face seemed very far away. At last he broke the silence by saying slowly: 'Does Florence know where you bought the brooch?'

'Yes.'

'The probable reason for the attempt on you is the fact that you could say where you bought it,' said Rollison. 'Assuming Florence is not involved, and I don't think she is, she may be in the same danger as you. What was the name of the hairdresser?'

Tips gasped: 'I don't know!'

‘She must have mentioned it,’ said Rollison, sharply. ‘You must remember.’

‘I—don’t—*know!’* repeated Tips, in a strangled voice.

In the silence that followed, the telephone bell rang.

Chapter Eighteen

Beauty Salon

Rollison let the telephone ring. Tips raised both hands, clenching them, and the veins began to stand out on his forehead. His eyes were narrowed and seemed filled with pain; it was as if he were facing something too terrible to contemplate, something which he was powerless to prevent. He opened his lips to speak, uttered something unintelligible, and then said explosively: 'I just don't know!'

The telephone bell kept ringing.

'You *must* remember,' Rollison insisted. 'She surely mentioned the name of the place.'

'I am trying. Rollison, *can't* you stop that bell?'

'Yes. And think of her friends, of any friend who might know where she goes.' Rollison spoke as he moved to the telephone, lifted the receiver and heard the deep, booming voice of Professor Lowry.

'My *dear* friend, how are you, how are you?' he demanded. 'I have your man here, Jolly, with this*remarkable* needle, and a request for an early report on the contents.'

'It's most important,' Rollison said, and put his hand over the mouthpiece. 'Was it near her rooms?'

'I'm trying,' muttered Tips.

'I give you my word, Mr Rollison, I was most surprised when I saw the needle,' Lowry said, *'most* surprised. It must be at least three hundred years old. I have not seen one of such antiquity except in private collections or in museums for many years.'

'Yes, but what was in it?' asked Rollison.

Tips stepped to the window, every movement stiff, clenching and unclenching his hands, while Professor Lowry, obviously delighted at the discovery of the antique needle, continued to talk of it. At last a blunt question from Rollison pulled him up.

'Ah yes, of course, the poison. *Most* unpleasant, *most* unpleasant, although whether you can rightly call it poison is a different matter. One man's insulin is another's poison!' He laughed heartily, while Rollison turned his attention from Tips, whose bandaged finger he could see clearly, and said with some relief: 'Are you sure that's what it is?'

'Oh, there is no doubt at all, I assure you,' said Lowry. 'It was, of course, sufficient to dry up the sugar in any man's blood, but I think the cause of death would have been most difficult to discover, *most* difficult. Well, I am very glad to have been able to help you again, my friend, and I do congratulate you on your remarkable find. I have sent my report back to you, through your manservant, and – I am sure you will forgive me about this – I have added a modest request that the police be informed as soon as

possible. I am sure you will not object to that.'

'Of course not,' said Rollison. 'A thousand thanks, Professor! Goodbye!' He replaced the receiver with relief, and as he did so Tips turned round; he looked like a man in torment.

'Rollison, isn't there something we can do? Can the police inquire at all the beauty parlours? I'm sure it's somewhere in the West End, it *must* be, because I'm meeting Florence at half-past four for tea at the Carlton. Or I'm supposed to meet her.' He took a step forward, unclasping his hands. 'Can't you do *any*thing?'

Rollison was already lifting the receiver, and he had dialled Scotland Yard when there was a sound in the hall. After a moment Jolly appeared. He stared at Tips, frowned, and turned to Rollison, who was saying: 'Give me Inspector Hill, please.' While he waited, Rollison tapped his right toe against the leg of the table, and then suddenly he turned and said: 'Jolly, where does Miss Hardy have her hair dressed?'

'At Maison Gay's,' said Jolly, without a moment's hesitation.

Tips shouted: 'Are you sure?'

'I clearly remember her discussing it with some of the other guests at the party. I am *quite* sure, sir.'

'Where is Gay's?' demanded Tips, wildly. 'Is it nearby? Can we ring for a taxi? Can we—'

'We'll pick one up, it will be quicker,' said Rollison. 'Hold the fort, Jolly.'

Tips was so eager to get out of the taxi when it stopped outside Gay's, in Brook Street, that he nearly collided with a small car which was passing. In spite of that he was inside Gay's before Rollison, who told the driver to wait, and hurried after him. A startled girl, perfectly made-up and dressed in a pink smock, looked in alarm at Tips as Rollison said sharply: 'Don't be a fool, Tips!' To the girl: 'Has Miss Hardy an appointment here for this afternoon?'

'Yes, sir, she is upstairs now.'

'Are you sure?' cried Tips.

'Which room?' asked Rollison.

'But you can't go upstairs, sir,' the girl protested.

Rollison picked up an appointments book which lay on the glass counter, and scanned the appointments for that day. There was the one: *Miss F. Hardy – M'sieu Bonnet, cubicle 17.* He hurried to a door through which he could see the stairs, closely followed by Tips.

'Sir! You can't!' The girl ran after them still protesting. A man with waved hair and a pointed beard popped through a curtain and added his voice to the protests. Behind him Rollison could see a woman sitting with her head in what looked like a metal helmet. Other curtains were drawn back for a moment, revealing startled clients in every stage of beauty preparation.

Rollison reached Cubicle 17, and thrust the curtain aside. The man with the pointed beard was carrying on a fluent protest in French, his eloquence outmatched by his waving arms.

Florence was sitting in front of a mirror, her head enveloped in white

lather. Her eyes turned, wide and rounded in astonishment. Tips rushed into the cubicle, gasping incoherently: 'Florence, are you all right?'

'Now take it easy,' said Rollison, authoritatively. 'Quiet, please!' He raised his voice above the babble of protests. 'Florence,' went on Rollison, in the silence that followed, 'there's nothing to be alarmed about yet, but try and remember whether you've pricked yourself this afternoon.'

Florence gasped: '*Pricked* myself? Are you *mad?'*

'Darling—' began Tips.

'Florence, this isn't a joke,' said Rollison, and when the man with marcelled hair began to speak again, he snapped: 'Be quiet, *m'sieu!'*

Florence brushed the lather away from her eyes and said in a rather scared voice: 'As a matter of fact, I *did* prick my finger when I opened my bag downstairs.'

Tips uttered an exclamation, half-gasp, half-groan.

Rollison said: 'Now take it easy, Tips. Go downstairs and tell the taxi to turn round, we're going to the Westminster Hospital. Then telephone Dr Mortimer, at the hospital, and tell him what's happened and that the patient will be there in a very few minutes.' He turned to the now silent Frenchman. 'Wrap Miss Hardy's head in a towel, she must leave here in two minutes.'

'But *m'sieu*—'

He met Rollison's eye, and without another word whipped a towel about Florence's head. Florence, still looking scared, stood up.

'There—there's nothing the matter with me,' she protested.

'You'll be as right as rain,' Rollison assured her, 'but you've probably been dosed with some stuff which won't do you any good if it stays in your bloodstream too long. Sorry about the drama,' he added, apologetically, 'oh, and let me have your bag.' He took charge of her bag and then led her downstairs, followed by the scared Frenchman and several girl attendants. It was obvious to them now that the invasion had a serious purpose, and there were no further reproaches.

Tips was waiting in the shop.

'Did you speak to Mortimer?' asked Rollison.

'Yes. He said we'd better not lose time, but it ought to be all right.'

'It is all right,' said Rollison, reassuringly. 'See that Florence is taken to Mortimer immediately she gets to the hospital.'

'Aren't you coming?'

'I'll call and see the patient later,' said Rollison, cheerfully. Goodbye!'

He stood watching the taxi as it drove off, and then turned in the direction of Scotland Yard.

The Assistant Commissioner was on holiday, but the Chief Constable was in his office, and there Rollison sat, with Inspector Hill, while the Chief Constable gave a lengthy discourse on the duty of the private citizen and his fear that Rollison was taking far too much upon himself. The Chief Constable had once been a Superintendent who had not approved of the activities of the Toff, and was now taking this opportunity to give full

expression to that disapproval. Rollison listened for some time and then broke in abruptly.

'You may be right to read the riot act – who am I to say you are not? – but is it *getting* us anywhere?'

The Chief Constable was too surprised to find an answer, and Rollison went on: 'The issues are plain enough. Jewels of great value have been stolen, but in spite of that, murder has been committed and more murder attempted. Whether I find the men responsible or you do, doesn't matter a row of beans.'

'I was pointing out that *we* have inestimable advantages—' began Merrick.

'Are you using them?' demanded Rollison. 'Is there any news of Lorne? Or of the man with the hooked nose?'

'Not yet, but—'

'Has the attendant at *Kundle's* been interrogated?'

'Yes,' said Hill.

'Do you know where Mary Henderson worked or how she earned her living?' asked Rollison, and Hill had to admit that he had been able to find out remarkably little about Mary. There had been no papers at her flat to give them information, although it was now suggested that she had been selling jewels on a commission basis.

'That has already been established,' said Rollison impatiently. 'The priority job is to find out the name of her employers.'

The Chief Constable snapped an order to Hill, who withdrew hastily.

There was an embarrassed silence.

Rollison thought it would be tactful to fill it with an apology for losing his temper. Merrick accepted the apology graciously, and thereafter became more human. He appreciated all that Rollison was trying to do, but Rollison must not be surprised if he was a *little* worried in case too much was done without the authority of Scotland Yard. The injury to Grice had upset them all.

'No more than it upsets me,' Rollison assured him. 'We are close friends, you know. What is the latest report?'

'There is reason to think he will recover,' said the Chief Constable, 'although he will be away for a long time, poor fellow, and I dread to think of the change in him we must expect.'

'Yes,' said Rollison, heavily. 'If Grice were here, I would make a suggestion which he would probably act upon, Merrick. I don't know whether I can expect the same of you.'

'Well, if I *can'*

Rollison said, slowly: 'It seems to me that one person who is still in acute danger is Katrina Morral. She has not been particularly helpful, and Grice once talked of detaining her for further questioning.'

Merrick said, in some surprise: 'Isn't she your cousin?'

'Cousin by marriage,' said Rollison, 'but what has that got to do with it?'

'Oh, of course, nothing,' said Merrick, hastily. 'What do you suggest we

do with her?'

'Detain her for questioning, to find out (a) whether she knew Mary Henderson before she came to England,' said Rollison, patiently, 'and (b) where she went when she left her husband. She undoubtedly spent some time with Lorne and the unknown man with the hooked nose. She might know where they live. Will you do that?'

'It seems a very reasonable suggestion,' Merrick said slowly.

'Good!' said Rollison. 'I think it might now show some dividends.'

He took his leave, wondering, as he paced the corridors of Scotland Yard, what Old Glory would say if she knew what he had done.

He did not return to Gresham Terrace until he had been to two newspaper offices in Fleet Street, and talked at length with the Society editors, amiable gentlemen who promised to try to find out how many people had been customers of Mary Henderson.

When he at last returned to his flat, Derek Morral was waiting for him.

Chapter Nineteen

Visit from Old Glory

Derek was furious. The police had taken Katrina away, ostensibly for questioning, although any fool could tell that they suspected her of some part in the crimes. Nothing could be more absurd. He said much more, nothing of which was logical, and he seemed to have forgotten that he himself had once suspected Katrina. Finally, he asked whether Rollison had any influence with Scotland Yard.

'Not enough to have her released,' Rollison said. 'In any case I don't think it would be advisable.'

'What?'

'A police cell is the safest place for Katrina until this affair is over,' said Rollison. 'After the flowers incident, anything might happen.'

'That's a pretty odd way of looking at it,' said Derek hotly.

'It's common sense,' said Rollison.

'So you won't try to help her?'

'I *am* trying to help her, in every way I can,' Rollison assured him. 'I warned you that she had not been frank enough with the police, and as you haven't been able to gain her confidence, the police will have to try.'

'You're as bad as they are!' growled Derek. He stalked out, full of anger against his cousin.

That was a little after six o'clock. Jolly came in with whisky and soda which he placed by Rollison's side.

'Thanks,' said Rollison, 'but I won't have one just yet. Mr Morral seemed annoyed, didn't he?'

'Shall we say anxious, sir?'

Rollison gave a brief laugh.

'It certainly *sounds* more pleasant. Has anyone been here this afternoon?'

'No, sir, and there have been no telephone calls.'

'Ah. A lull before, or after, the storm – which is it?' said Rollison lightly. 'Have you heard anything about Miss Hardy?'

'Mr Tippets rang through to say that he was assured at the hospital that there was no danger, they were able to counteract the effect of the insulin in good time. It was not serious, because Miss Hardy has diabetic tendencies.'

'So Miss Hardy had a dose of insulin, too,' commented Rollison thoughtfully. 'Not the easiest stuff to get hold of, insulin. It adds a complication which we could well do without. Give me that handbag, will you?' He took Florence's bag from Jolly, opened it cautiously, and saw another hollow needle, which was fitted to the clasp as cunningly as the one that had been fitted into Tips' cigarette case. 'Another antique, to please Professor Lowry,' he added with a grimace. 'Question one: where did they get the needles? Question two: where did they get the insulin? Question

three: who and where are they?' He took the needle out, using tweezers, and laid it on the tray. 'There was a time when this affair seemed fairly simple. A matter only of a jewel robbery. But now I'm pondering if it's quite as cut-and-dried as that. Have you any notions?'

'None at all, I'm afraid,' said Jolly.

'Then let's assume that the jewels *are* the motive,' decided Rollison, 'which means assuming also that the subsequent murder, and attempted murder, are simply intended to make sure that no one can find the jewels. As they're so valuable, perhaps that's a sufficient motive. As for the ice-cream, I still think that if we knew who put the arsenic in the container, we should know a great deal more than we already do.'

'I *have* a suggestion to make about that, sir.'

'Then go ahead.'

'Well, sir, Miss Hardy was at the ice-cream counter, if I may use the expression, and was therefore almost certain to eat a little. Also, Mr Tippets, Miss Henderson and your cousin were at the party and all of them have since been victims of later attacks. It may be that Lorne, who was also there, thought it worthwhile trying to get rid of them all in one fell swoop, as it were.'

'Hum,' said Rollison.

'Don't you think it likely, sir?'

'I wouldn't rate it as high as that,' said Rollison. 'It's a thought, of course. But there was no guarantee that any one of those particular people would eat ice-cream, and there was a great risk that people in whom Lorne wasn't interested would suffer.'

'Not if the moment was judged at precisely the time when most of the victims-to-be were in the group waiting for ice-cream,' said Jolly.

Rollison looked at him thoughtfully.

'That's true, but it is unlikely that they would all have the urge for ice-cream at the same moment. Grice always declared that the arsenic got into the ice-cream by accident, suggesting that it dropped out of someone's hand. That could have happened, but I think there's a far more plausible explanation, which would also allow for some degree of chance.'

Jolly murmured a gentle encouragement.

'Yes,' Rollison went on. 'Let's assume that you, in the first place, are right about the intention to administer arsenic to certain people. Whoever did it would, if he or she were wise, shake only the *powder* in. In other words, the tube would be emptied into the ice-cream, and no one would notice a little white powder. It would stay on the top, and as Miss Hardy served the ices, the first-comers would get the arsenic. That's reasonable, isn't it?'

'Undoubtedly,' said Jolly.

'Then, I think, came the accident,' said Rollison. 'The man or woman dropped tube and all. There was a risk that the tube would be noticed, so he or she, waiting for the right moment, leaned over and poked it deeper into the container. There, it was hidden from sight. Miss Hardy decided that the stuff wanted a stir, and duly stirred. So the arsenic was spread more thinly,

the tube broke, and far more people suffered than was originally expected,'

'I see, sir,' said Jolly, mildly.

'You don't like the theory?' asked Rollison.

'I haven't found it wholly convincing, sir,' said Jolly, 'although I do agree that it is possible that the tube was being emptied into the ice-cream and was dropped by accident.'

'Grant me that, and the rest surely follows,' claimed Rollison.

'I suppose so,' admitted Jolly, and allowed himself to smile. 'Although I originally suggested that it might have been intended to serve the ice-cream laced with arsenic to those who were waiting for it at a given moment, I now wonder whether that *was* practical, sir. When all is said and done, it would have been much more effective had a small amount of the powder been put into the ice-cream already on plates held by the would-be victims.'

'But more difficult to do,' said Rollison.

'I wonder, sir, whether it would not have been easier? After all, few people ate their ice-cream right off. Most of them had a spoonful or two, and then put their plates down. Amid the hubbub, it would not have been impossible to drop a pinch of arsenic on to a plate.'

'But that wasn't done,' objected Rollison.

'Can we be sure that it wasn't?' asked Jolly.

Rollison leaned back, and waited for him to continue.

'I am thinking of the fact that most of the people who suffered from arsenic poisoning showed surprisingly little ill effects,' said Jolly, 'because such prompt action was taken. Now, let us suppose that larger doses were given to certain people and then the *remainder* was dropped into the container? There, it seemed safely hidden. Mr Tippets, however, found the small piece of glass too soon. Immediate action was taken, and the stomach pumps were used to such good effect that no one suffered badly. Imagine the acute disappointment of the criminal, sir – a man, or woman as you rightly say, who thought he could murder all the people who were in his way at one go, and then found that none of them was seriously hurt.'

'Ah, yes,' murmured Rollison.

'And then, sir,' said Jolly, standing up and walking to the window, an indication that he was about to tread on dangerous ground, 'we have to consider one inescapable fact. *Only* people who ate ice-cream were to suffer. Most people at the party did, but there were glaring exceptions.'

Jolly turned, and looked frankly at the Toff.

'Ah,' said Rollison, again. 'Three glaring exceptions. You, who never eat ice-cream. Lady Gloria, who rarely does. And Mrs Morral. If Mrs Morral knew what was going to happen, it would be reasonable for her to avoid the stuff. She *does* eat ice-cream, Jolly.'

'Are you sure, sir?'

'Yes. She had some at *Kundle's* the other night. Yet at *Kundle's* an attempt was made to murder her.'

Jolly said, gently: 'Was it, sir?'

Rollison sat forward, looking at him intently. Jolly clasped his hands

together, and rubbed them gently, as if he were a little afraid of the consequence of his suggestions. Rollison, very still, did not speak for an appreciable time. Eventually he moved forward abruptly, picked up the whisky bottle, and as he poured himself a drink, said quietly: 'I think you've got that worked out well, Jolly.'

'Thank you, sir.'

'The flowers were sent to a table near which I was sitting,' said Rollison musingly, 'and there was a card inscribed in red ink, which it was known would make me suspicious. So in all probability it was inferred that I would take the basket away and examine it myself, and when pulling the flowers out one by one, would get the whole explosion in my face as Grice did. That's what you mean, isn't it?'

'Yes,' said Jolly.

'Very subtle,' said Rollison. 'But tell me, who knew that I knew that red ink was an object of suspicion?'

'Lady Gloria and Mrs Morral,' murmured Jolly.

'Yes,' said Rollison, and lifting his glass drank deeply. 'Yes, indeed. Now we can more clearly understand why Lady Gloria asked me to go away because, she made it obvious, she was afraid of what I would find out. She was afraid that I would discover Mrs Morral was involved in this. There's only one thing wrong with that, Jolly.'

'And that is, sir?'

'Lady Gloria has never shirked an issue to my knowledge,' said Rollison. 'She faces facts, no matter how unpleasant. I wonder what she really *knows*. Jolly.' He was silent for a moment, and then added: 'And I wonder why she went off with Mrs Morral on the night of the party.'

'Will you go and see her, sir?'

'Not yet,' said Rollison. 'I hope that she will come and see me.'

She arrived a little after eight o'clock, when Rollison was having coffee after a modest dinner. She had not telephoned, but arrived without warning; and the first thing that struck him was that she looked older. She also looked tired, and there was no fire in her eyes as she sat down opposite him.

'I've been expecting you,' said Rollison.

'I suppose you have,' said Old Glory. 'Did you arrange for Katrina to be arrested?'

'Detained,' corrected Rollison.

'Don't quibble. It's the same thing. Did you arrange it?'

'I suggested it. She will be safer with the police.'

'Do you really think that?' demanded Old Glory, 'or are you pretending, Rolly?'

'Guess,' said Rollison.

'Are you *afraid* of what Katrina has done?' asked Old Glory, and when he did not immediately reply, she went on: 'Or are you afraid of what Derek will do if he discovers the truth?'

Still Rollison kept silent.

Old Glory said: 'I believed in her, Rolly. Although she would not tell me

the whole truth, I believed in her and trusted her, and now I am afraid that she has been a party to all these crimes. It is too terrible to contemplate. Poor, poor Derek.'

'I suppose you couldn't be taking too much for granted?' asked Rollison, quietly.

'I don't think so,' said Old Glory. 'Rolly, I asked you to leave this case, on the spur of the moment, because I hated the thought that you might have to hurt Derek, but you were right not to take my advice. You always have had a marked sense of duty.'

'Oh,' murmured Rollison, more than a little startled.

'Now, Rolly, listen to me. In the beginning, I thought this was simply a matter of a young married couple unable to settle their differences. Katrina gave me to understand that she went away from Derek *only* after he had behaved so abominably that she could hardly stay with him. Three times, she told me, she left him; and three times she returned, hoping that she had taught him a lesson. I considered her behaviour praiseworthy.'

'Yes,' murmured Rollison.

'She told me, also, that she had seen this man Lorne, a man whom she had met one night at a restaurant when she was alone, and that she allowed herself to be seen with Lorne because she knew that Derek was having her watched. She hoped that it would make him jealous. She declared, however, that although she had been about in public with him, she always spent the night alone at a small hostel. I believed her. I believed her, Rolly, because I wanted to think the best of her. And then, on the night of your party – I wish to heaven I had never planned it! – she went off on her own, and I thought she was so forlorn that she needed company, so I went to the hostel instead of to my club. She was not there.'

'Oh,' said Rollison.

'However, she arrived a little after one o'clock,' said Old Glory, 'and looked weary and worn-out. She told me she had walked about London, too miserable to return to the hostel. That seemed perfectly understandable, so I stayed with her that night. There was not, you see, any great mystery about it.'

'You gave us some anxious moments. Why didn't you tell me all this at the time?' asked Rollison.

'I meant to let the club know, but it went right out of my mind until it was too late to disturb them. I thought they would assume I had come in unnoticed, and so wouldn't worry about me. Which is what would have happened if you hadn't stirred up trouble. However, I was not wholly satisfied. Derek did not quite bear out Katrina's story. Derek is like you in some ways, a stickler for the truth – and you need not grin like that!' she snapped. 'Because you are a stickler for the truth, although would readily lie when you are on an investigation. That is in the way of business. I felt that Derek would, sooner or later, confess to me that he had behaved badly, but he continued to maintain that he could not understand what had come over Katrina. Well, to cut a long story short, Rolly, an hour or two before I

telephoned you and asked you to go away, Derek telephoned me. He said Katrina had left him again. I went immediately to the hostel. She was not there. I made inquiries. She did reserve a room there from time to time, *but only once before had she slept at the hostel.* I mean, only once before the night of the party.

'Well,' said Old Glory, after a long pause, 'it was immediately obvious to me then that Katrina had been lying.'

'Instead of asking me to go away, you should have told me that Katrina was missing,' said Rollison. 'She didn't stay away for long this time.'

'No. She returned that afternoon. I was so dispirited, that I decided to wash my hands of the whole affair. *That* frame of mind did not last long, however, and I went to Derek's flat again this afternoon, determined to face them both together and try to get at the truth. I found Katrina under arrest, and Derek in a strange and bitter mood. I have done all I can do to help him, but he is afraid of the truth, of course. I have never seen him so distressed. Only by assuring him that I *still* believe in Katrina did I manage to pacify him.'

Old Glory stopped, and leaned back. Rollison got up, and poured out a still tot of brandy, which he handed to her.

Old Glory took the glass, but did not drink immediately. She said wearily: 'It appears to me that Katrina is a tool of this man Lorne and his companions, and that her purpose was to find out where the jewels were and so enable them to steal them. That is what you believe, isn't it?'

Rollison said: 'I think it's possible, but I'm not yet sure.'

'What doubt can there be?'

'I am wondering whether anyone with so much on her conscience could be as happy as Katrina was at *Kundle's* the other night,' murmured Rollison.

Old Glory looked at him shrewdly.

'You almost make me hope,' she said, and then turned her head quickly, for the front door bell rang. 'I wonder if that's Derek?' she added.

Chapter Twenty

Hot News

The Rev. Ronald Kemp strode into the flat in some excitement, but his face dropped when he saw Lady Gloria, whom he knew slightly. His hair was dishevelled and his shoes were covered with dust. His hands, also, were far from clean.

He bowed awkwardly to Lady Gloria.

'Good evening, Mr Kemp,' she said, and immediately got up. 'I am glad you have come, because it makes me realise that I ought to have left an hour ago.'

'Don't go for me, please,' said Kemp, insincerely.

'I am going for myself,' said Old Glory graciously. 'The old need rest.' Rollison led her into the hall, where Jolly was already telephoning for a taxi. 'If the young man has come with *another* case, Rolly,' she whispered, 'I hope you won't take it until this one is finished.'

'Cross my heart,' said Rollison with a grin.

Kemp was sitting on the edge of the sofa, eager and boyish, when Rollison returned to the sitting-room. He burst out: 'I say, Rolly, I think I've got something you will find useful.'

'Good!' said Rollison, cheerfully.

'I've been keeping my eyes open,' said Kemp. 'Of course, I've followed the case in the newspapers and I *think* I know where the man with the hooked nose lives.'

Rollison said: *'What?'*

'And when I read that he was wanted for questioning and that he had last been seen at Mary Henderson's flat, and before that at your birthday do, I really started to think,' Kemp went on. 'You see, I *thought* I'd seen him before when I saw him in your flat. You can't forget a man with a nose like that, can you? The thing is, *did* he wear a wig?'

'Not that I noticed,' said Rollison.

Jolly, who was standing by the door, said apologetically: 'That was a point I was once going to raise myself, sir. I saw him more closely than you, and I wondered whether his hair was his own. His neck seemed too cleanly shaven. Quite a lot of men wear wigs nowadays, but it's the neck that gives them away.'

'Well, here's corroboration!' cried Kemp, rubbing his hands together in high glee. 'Now, there's a firm of jewellers in Whitechapel Road, quite a big firm, wholesale and retail, you know. They deal mostly in trash, but they've a small shop where they sell good stuff. I'm pretty sure that I've seen this hooked-nose Johnny there from time to time. If that *is* the chap, his name's Jacobson.'

'What's the name of the firm?' asked Rollison.

‘Waller and Kell,’ said Kemp, ‘and I’ll tell you another thing, Rolly. I *think* I’ve seen Mary Henderson go in there once or twice. I pass the shop half a dozen times a day and although I don’t know the poor child well, I remembered her when I saw her at the flat. I met Jacobson only this afternoon, that’s why it dawned on me. As a matter of fact,’ added Kemp, with a rather embarrassed laugh, ‘I followed him down to the docks, after dark. That’s why I’m in this mess.’

‘What did he do at the docks?’ asked Rollison swiftly, and he pointed to the telephone. Jolly immediately dialled Whitehall 1212, while Kemp said ruefully: ‘I can’t tell you that, because I lost him. There are several ships loading and unloading by floodlight, and so many people about that I lost him fairly soon. Of course, it might not be the same man,’ added Kemp, suddenly cautious, ‘but I shall be surprised if it isn’t.’

‘And so shall I be,’ said Rollison.

‘Inspector Hill is on the line,’ said Jolly sedately.

‘I’ll speak to him.’ Rollison went to the telephone, and was immediately greeted by a doleful voice. If Rollison wanted to know whether Katrina Morral had talked freely, he could have the answer forthwith: she had not. Nothing seemed to worry her, Hill went on, she practically ignored him and everyone who questioned her, and did not seem to be in the slightest degree alarmed.

‘Never mind Katrina Morral now,’ said Rollison.

‘But you advised us to pull her in!’ protested Hill.

‘Yes, and you were wise enough to detain her,’ said Rollison, ‘but that isn’t what’s worrying me at the moment.’ He sent a resigned look towards Jolly, and went on: ‘Do you know anything about the firm of Waller and Kell, in Whitechapel Road?’

‘The jewellers?’

‘Yes.’

They’re junk merchants,’ said Hill, his voice strengthening as he felt himself to be on firmer ground.

‘Do you know a chap called Jacobson, who works for them?’

‘I don’t know him personally,’ said Hill. ‘Wait a moment, Gibson probably does.’ Rollison heard him call: ‘Gibson!’ and then a muttered conversation, before Hill came on the line again. ‘Yes, Gibson knows him. He’s the general manager, and has been with them for years. I—what’s that?’ He was speaking to Gibson again, and when he came back to Rollison there was an excited note in his voice. ‘I say, Rollison, Gibson has had a report that Mary Henderson was sometimes seen to go into Waller and Kell’s. A constable recognised her photograph.’

Rollison said: ‘Splendid! I think Jacobson’s our hooked- nosed man.’

‘But he’s as bald as a coot!’

‘Imagine him with a wig,’ said Rollison happily. ‘Will you hold him at once?’

‘Well,’ began Hill, and then added crisply: ‘Yes, of course, I can ask him about Mary Henderson’s visits.’

‘Hold him on any count, but hold him,’ begged Rollison. He replaced the receiver, and shook his head sadly. ‘If only Grice were on duty.’

‘I think Hill will act quickly enough, sir,’ said Jolly.

‘Oh, yes. More capable than he looks, and lacking only in confidence,’ said Rollison, absently. He smiled at Kemp. ‘You’ve been more help than you realise, old chap.’

‘I hoped I wasn’t making a fool of myself,’ said Kemp. ‘I wish I could stay, but I must fly, I put forward a church committee meeting to come and see you, but only by an hour. Let me know if there is anything I can do tomorrow, won’t you?’

‘I will,’ Rollison promised him. ‘How did you come?’

‘By car.’

‘Then will you give me a lift?’

Kemp said he would be delighted to do so. He had a low two-seater, which snorted noisily and made conversation difficult. Kemp ignored the snorts, however, and pitching his voice to a bellow, asked innumerable questions. The evening papers said something about Florence Hardy being in hospital, was that another development in the case? He hoped she was not badly hurt, because he had known her for some time, and in a way was fond of her. He had heard a rumour that she was seeing a lot of Tippets; he had known Tippets before the war, at Oxford. Very sound fellow, Tippets, and a first-class bat. With Kemp, most things led eventually to cricket or boxing. Florence and Tips would make an excellent match, Kemp thought; was there anything in it?

So he went on, until at last he put Rollison down near Whitechapel Church, and said regretfully: ‘I wish I could cut my meeting, Rolly, but I can’t.’

‘You’ve done all that could be asked of you,’ Rollison assured him, ‘and a good deal more. Which way is Waller and Kell’s?’

‘About fifty yards further up,’ said Kemp. ‘I thought you wouldn’t want to be dropped right outside.’

‘And you were right,’ said Rollison.

He walked along the crowded road, jostled by the people, feeling a nostalgia for the East End, which he had deserted for so long, as Old Glory had pointedly reminded him. There was a quality about the people living in these mean, crowded streets which had always appealed to him. Dark-eyed, befurred Jewesses with plump, olive-skinned men escorting them, street arabs still up and about, hawkers doing surreptitious sales from their barrows, girls and young men strolling arm-in-arm past the bright lights of picture palaces and amusement saloons; all of these things held a value for him.

Waller and Kell turned out to be a large establishment, with three double-fronted shop windows, barred and bolted for the night, and covered with an iron grille. There were no lights inside the shop. Two or three men in plainclothes were standing by a side door. Among them was Hill.

Rollison joined them.

Hill gave him a wintery smile.

'I thought you would turn up. I'm waiting until I get a message from the men at the back.'

'There isn't much sign of life,' said one of the others, whom Rollison recognised as Sergeant Gibson. 'Jacobson lives above the shop, I think.'

'Think!' said Hill, acidly.

Obviously there was some tension among the police, and Rollison tactfully remained silent. Presently a plainclothes man came hurrying along the street, to say that the men were now stationed at the rear of the premises and that every door and window was covered.

By then a crowd had gathered, a jostling but silent crowd, resentful of the police, inclined to be on the side of the wrongdoer. There was no active hostility, however, and Rollison, with his natural sense of the East End, took this to mean that Waller and Kell was not a popular establishment.

Gibson had been ringing the door-bell, without response.

'All right, let's get in,' said Hill.

He was a much better man when he had something to do than when he was at the Yard, and his men trusted him. He himself used a skeleton key dexterously, and they heard the lock go back; but the door did not open.

'Bolted,' said Hill. 'That's hopeful.'

It meant that there was probably someone inside. Rollison's spirits rose as he watched two hefty policemen put their shoulders to the door, to the accompaniment of ironic applause from the crowd.

Then Rollison saw an onlooker glance upwards, and nudge his neighbour.

At the same moment the door crashed in.

'I'll go first,' said Hill, and pushed his way into the hall. Rollison, acutely aware of the upward glance, backed into the crowd, craning his neck; he saw a man climbing from a window above the shop. He was trying to get from one flat to the next, and he was, at the moment, unaware that he had been seen.

The man was Lorne.

Chapter Twenty-One

The End of a Handsome Man

Rollison saw Lorne clearly in the light from an amusement saloon on the other side of the road. He hurried forward, and shouted down the passage along which Hill was already making his way: 'Lorne's at a third-floor window!'

'Third?' cried Hill, and raced up the stairs. 'We'll get him!' Rollison went back into the street.

The crowd had now transferred its interest to the man at the window, and there was no doubt where its sympathy lay. It was solidly behind Lorne, and suddenly there was a roar of encouragement, for he had managed to get from one window sill to another, and stood there precariously.

For the first time, he looked down.

There was fear on his handsome face, and he was obviously startled by the roar, for his foot slipped. The crowd drew in its breath.

'He'll fall!'

'Careful!'

'Give the man a chance!'

'He's wanted for murder,' Rollison said, in a sharp voice. 'A messy murder. Don't waste your sympathy.'

'Who the hell—' a man began, and then his voice rose up in surprise, and he cried, 'Strewth, it's Mr Ar!'

'Roll'son!'

'Strike me if it ain't the ruddy Torf!'

'Cor strike a light, Guv'ner, ain't you dead yet?'

Rollison laughed. 'I'm not so near it as the man up there. Can someone lay hands on some blankets, in case he falls? Tarpaulins would do.'

'Askin' for a lot, aincha?' remarked someone, good- humouredly.

'Bill! Mr Ar wants some blankets!' piped a woman.

'Okey-doke, Mr Ar.'

Rollison stood watching, hardly aware of the fact that so many people knew him and that their attitude was wholly friendly. They were watching Lorne, who no longer had their sympathy. Several of them hurried away, to come back in a few minutes with blankets already unfolded. Half a dozen men held them out beneath Lorne, who was now swinging from one window sill to another.

There was a sudden cheer; a policeman appeared at the first window, and climbed out, while the crowd began to shout conflicting advice. Lorne turned, and saw how close was his pursuer. He stood clutching a pipe with one hand while he put his hand to his pocket.

Rollison shouted: 'Careful! He's armed!'

Lorne glanced down. The lurid glare showed his eyes, feverishly bright,

and his parted lips. He took an automatic out of his pocket and pointed it at the policeman, who could not back away.

The crowd seemed to go mad with excitement.

'Stow it!' roared a man on the pavement.

'Drop that gun!'

'The ruddy tyke, I wish I could git my 'ands on 'im!'

'Don't shoot!' roared Rollison. *'Don't shoot,* Lorne!'

Was it a waste of words? He waited, breathless, while Lorne seemed to hesitate. Then Lorne looked down again. He was looking for someone; he saw Rollison, and his lips tightened. He turned the gun downwards!

'Look out!' cried Rollison. 'Scatter!'

The crowd needed no telling.

Twice Lorne fired, and the crowd swayed outwards and then broke up. Men and women dashed back into the road, narrowly escaping the passing traffic. Rollison moved quickly against the window, out of Lorne's line of vision. The trouble was, in this position, he could not see the man. People on the other side of the road were now bellowing at Lorne, and someone was lying hurt on the pavement. A woman rushed towards him, calling a name. Two or three men joined her, while others stood shaking their fists at Lorne. Then came a cry.

'He's dropped it!'

Rollison stepped forward. Something hit the ground close to him, and there was a flash of flame and a sharp report; then a crash, as a bullet from Lorne's gun crashed into a plate-glass window. As the din faded, Rollison went back to the

kerb. He saw that Lorne was trying to get back to the window sill, and that the policeman was now at the next window.

Someone brought a ladder.

Several eager helpers placed it into position, and a policeman came hurrying forward.

'My job,' said Rollison.

Lorne had now managed to regain a footing on the sill, and was standing bent over, and breathing heavily. Rollison began to climb the ladder, his sole purpose being to prevent Lorne from grappling with the policeman, who was now leaning forward in an attempt to reach Lorne's sill.

Lorne tried to grip the top rung of the ladder. The crowd gasped. Rollison went steadily upwards; then the policeman shot out a hand. As it touched Lorne's arm he gave a violent jerk; and slipped.

'Ahhhh!' sighed the crowd.

Rollison saw the fall, but was powerless either to avert or dodge it. Lorne turned over in the air, touched the ladder but did not shift it, and then hit the ground, head first.

Hill was disconsolate. The first time they really got at close grips with the devils, he said, Lorne had to fall and break his neck. If that wasn't bad enough, Jacobson had left earlier in the evening, his destination unknown.

Because Ronald Kemp had seen him go to the docks, the police were searching all ships which were loading or unloading, and that was no easy task. There were no crates at Waller and Kell's of the size for which they were searching, nothing useful in the way of evidence except, in a safe which they had to cut open with an oxy-acetylene burner, a book containing a list of names and addresses, alongside of which were money entries.

One of the names was Mary Henderson's.

'And we already knew she was in the business,' said Hill, a trifle petulantly. 'I can't see anything else in it, can you?'

'Not yet,' said Rollison, 'but you'll find it useful, old chap. Don't be too glum, we are making progress.'

'We ougsaaqht to have got here *days* ago.'

'We could have been later,' said Rollison, soothingly. 'Who's in charge at the docks?'

'Cartwright, the Divisional man. But looking for Jacobson there will be like looking for a drunk in a pub.'

Rollison laughed. 'Not as bad as that, surely. Let's go and find out what ships are loading.'

Lorne's body had been taken to the mortuary, and the police were still in possession of Waller and Kell's shops and warehouses, which they were systematically going through in search of the missing jewels. Among the thousands of boxes of cheap jewellery, it was possible that some valuable loot could be hidden, and every piece, however trumpery, would be examined before the police were finished.

'Well, why *are* we going to the docks?' demanded Hill. 'We know Cartwright won't miss Jacobson, if he's there.'

'Is Cartwright looking for a ship that's going to the Far East?' asked Rollison.

'Why should he?' demanded Hill, and then more quickly: 'Oh, I *see*! I ought to have seen it before. You think they might be sending those relics back to Siam, do you?'

'It's possible,' Rollison said.

'But what about that brooch?'

'They would want some pickings in London,' Rollison said, and went on thoughtfully: 'It has been almost too ruthless to be the work of jewel thieves, Hill. I've wondered from time to time if there isn't something deeper in it. Religion strikes deep, you know, and these things come from temples which have been inviolate for years. But I'm only guessing,' he added, with a laugh. He felt in high fettle, in spite of Lorne's death; it seemed to him that they would not be much longer in the dark. He was keenly aware that he had been lucky not to be injured by Lorne's shooting. The only man who had been hurt had a flesh wound in the thigh, and was not in danger.

'Your guesses usually go pretty near the mark,' said Hill, with grudging approval. 'Well, here we are – and there's Cartwright.'

The Superintendent of the Docks Division of the CID was talking to a dockyard official. He looked with some surprise at Rollison as he shook

hands.

'Thought you'd deserted us for good, Mr Rollison.'

'Don't tell me you want me back,' said Rollison.

'To tell you the truth, it isn't quite the same without you,' said Cartwright. 'Back for good?'

'I wouldn't be surprised,' said Rollison.

'All of this is *most* interesting,' said Hill, nervily, 'but have you found Jacobson?'

'No, he's not here,' said Cartwright. 'I've been at work for two hours, and put a lot of men on the job. If Jacobson were here we would have found him by now. He *was* down, earlier tonight, but he didn't go aboard any of the ships.'

'Is there anything in for the Far East?' Hill asked.

'There's the *SS Baku*,' said Cartwright. 'Sailing for Burma tomorrow, I think – where's Milky? *Milky!'* As he raised his voice, the dockyard official came hurrying towards him. 'Isn't *Baku* due for Burma?'

'Rangoon and Bangkok,' said Milky.

'There you are,' said Cartwright, looking keenly at Hill. 'These sparklers originally came from Bangkok, didn't they?' His eyes were bright. *'Now* there's a job, Milky, we want to see the cargo on board the *Baku.'*

'But the holds are fastened down, it's ready to sail!'

'Sorry,' said Cartwright. 'Job's got to be done.'

'And at *once,'* insisted Hill.

'There'll be a riot,' prophesied Milky, with gloomy satisfaction. 'The men have been working overtime to get that ship ready. Strewth, there won't half be a riot, and it will take all night with *your* men.'

'Then lend us some of yours,' said Cartwright, comfortably.

'We're wasting too much time,' complained Hill.

With a sideways grin at Rollison, Cartwright hurried off to attend to the formalities, while Milky called in a surprisingly deep voice for volunteers to work on *SS Baku.* The lurid comments which followed showed that he had judged well the temper of the men, but a gang was made up at last, consisting of policemen and dockers, and the holds were unfastened. The master, a peppery little man, complained bitterly that he would miss the tide, but Cartwright soothed him, while Rollison stood near one of the hatches and watched the men at work.

He was surprised to hear a mild voice behind him say: 'Can you spare me a moment, sir?'

Rollison turned.

'Hallo, Jolly! Trouble?'

'I am a little perturbed, sir,' said Jolly, raising his bowler hat. 'I had a message from Lady Gloria. Apparently she went to see Mr Morral, but he was not at home. At her request, I went to Green Street, where there were signs of a hurried departure. On the other hand,' continued Jolly, 'the detective officer who was on duty outside the house did not see Mr Morral leave, nor did the man who was on duty at the back. It appears that there

was some disturbance about an hour ago, when a small car ran into a wall, and presumably Mr Morral left while the attention of the police was distracted.'

'What time was he missed and when did the accident happen?'

'The accident was at eight-thirty, sir, and Lady Gloria reached the flat a little after nine-thirty. It is now twenty minutes to eleven,' said Jolly, informatively. 'The police are aware of the disappearance, naturally, but I thought you had better be informed at once.'

'Thanks,' said Rollison, briefly.

'Has any progress been made here tonight?' asked Jolly hopefully.

Rollison told him what had happened, while the night air was filled with the noises of the men working in the holds, many of them still giving vent to their feelings. Cartwright was down with them, but Hill had gone to Scotland Yard to report. He intended, he said, to pay another call at Waller and Kell's on the way. Rollison and Jolly were alone on deck for a few minutes. It was then that Rollison saw a man standing by a pile of empty crates on the edge of the dock.

He did not appear to give the man much attention, but said to Jolly: 'You remember our shabby man?'

'Only too well, sir,' said Jolly.

'I think he's watching,' said Rollison, softly. 'Go ashore, walk straight towards the road, and then double back and get behind the empty crates there. I'll watch him while you're gone.'

Jolly went off, walking briskly and making no attempt to conceal his movements. The man in the shadows did not stir. Rollison decided to wait until he caught sight of Jolly, behind the man, and then to close in.

Jolly's bowler hat appeared. Rollison moved towards the shore, and was so intent on catching the shabby man that a shout from the hold really startled him. It was Cartwright, who hoisted himself up to the deck, and shouted again: 'Rollison! *Rollison!* I think we've found those three crates!'

As he spoke, the shabby man moved, and Jolly closed in.

Chapter Twenty-Two

The Relics

Cartwright was still shouting joyfully as Rollison made a flying leap from the deck to the dockside. The shabby man, taken by surprise, staggered away from Jolly but recovered quickly. He brought his fist down on top of Jolly's bowler, forcing it over Jolly's eyes. Then he kicked Jolly out of his way.

Cartwright changed his tune.

'I'm coming!' he bellowed.

The shabby man glanced behind him, and saw Rollison only twenty yards away. He bent down, picked up a piece of wood and flung it in front of Rollison, who saw it coming but was too late to get out of the way. He kicked against it, and lost his balance.

The shabby man fled between two piles of crates, while Jolly struggled furiously to remove his bowler and Cartwright came pounding up. The floodlight illuminated the passage for half its length, and the shabby man was still in sight when Rollison reached it. Then he disappeared into the darkness, and the soft pounding of his feet sounded clearly through the night air.

Other men were rushing from the *Baku,* and Cartwright was shouting orders. They split up into two groups, one going to the left and the other right, while Rollison ran along the passage, straining his eyes in case the shabby man threw something in his path again. He could hear the fugitive's footsteps rapidly receding.

Suddenly, the shabby man appeared in the light of a lamp on a warehouse wall. Rollison, quickening his pace, saw the man vanish again. Cartwright drew up, breathing heavily.

'Did you see which way he went?'

'Straight ahead,' said Rollison, 'but that won't help us.'

Not far ahead was a cobbled roadway, and the cobbles made painful going. There were several roads leading from the dock gates and as many alleys, all running between tall, gaunt-looking warehouses, most of which were in complete darkness. The sound of men's voices travelled clearly. Soon more police arrived, but Rollison doubted whether it was worthwhile to continue the chase. Cartwright had no such scruples, and sent his men in all directions.

Rollison bent down and picked up a pair of filthy flannel trousers.

'New version of the striptease,' he murmured.

'Is this a time to be funny?' asked Cartwright.

'Not funny, inescapable fact. Our man shed his clothes as he ran, which proves two things. He wants to keep in the neighbourhood but to remain unrecognised, and he wore another suit beneath his rags.'

‘I suppose we oughtn’t to be surprised about that,’ said Cartwright, gloomily. ‘I expect it was Jacobson.’

‘It wasn’t,’ said Rollison.

‘Then who was it?’

‘A man whose name we’ve never known, who was employed by Gordon’s Agency, and at first gave me the impression that he was a fool,’ said Rollison, with a rueful grin. ‘I was certainly taken in. I wish I knew what he really looked like.’

‘Have you seen him often?’

‘Yes, but that doesn’t help much,’ said Rollison. ‘If he always wore two suits, he would look much fatter than he is. He used make-up of some sort, kidding me that he was a scruffy-looking specimen usually in need of a shave.’

Cartwright said testily: ‘He would come just then.’

‘Have you actually found the crates?’ demanded Rollison.

‘I’m pretty sure we have. You’d better come and see.’

Several of Cartwright’s men were returning, now, disappointed because they had found no trace of their quarry, and they trooped back towards the *SS Baku.* Work had been stopped on board, and the decks were filled with men standing about idly, a few of them drinking tea or coffee or an occasional beer. Milky lowered a bottle as Rollison and Cartwright came up.

‘Don’t you realise that we’re in a hurry?’ he demanded, peevishly, drawing a hand across his lips. ‘There’s still a chance of catching the morning tide, the ship can’t sail until half-past ten.’

‘I won’t keep you long,’ promised Cartwright.

He led the way to the hold, lowering himself and dropping down among great piles of crates. Rollison followed him. A few policemen stood about, looking tired in the bright light from a powerful lamp in the roof. Three of them were gathered in one corner, where a crate had been broken open. A sergeant preened himself, and remarked audibly: *‘I thought* there was something funny about those big fellows.’

‘Yes. You did a good job,’ Cartwright said to him. ‘This is what we found, Rollison – three small crates inside three large ones. Dickinson here opened a large one, and put us on to it. Well – *are* they what you’re looking for?’

‘I don’t know until we’ve looked inside,’ said Rollison. ‘Morral could tell them from their appearance, but I’ve never seen them before.’ The fact that Derek was missing worried him. ‘Can they be opened?’

‘Right away, sir.’ Dickinson picked up a crow-bar. ‘Shall I go ahead, Super?’

Cartwright nodded.

Other men were crowding round, and Jolly appeared unobtrusively holding his battered bowler under his arm. There was a quickening excitement everywhere as Dickinson began work with the crow-bar. But he made little headway until a docker took over, adroitly inserting the crow-bar between two pieces of the crate until, with a loud splitting sound, they fell apart.

There appeared to be another package inside the crate, a cardboard carton packed in a waterproof casing. The docker picked up the crow-bar again.

'Steady,' said Rollison. 'We need something smaller.'

The docker sniffed, and pulled a jack-knife from his pocket; he did not intend to be thwarted at the eleventh hour. He set to work on the container with surprising gentleness, running the knife round the edges and handling it as if it were fragile china. Then he lifted the top of the carton out; inside was a layer of cotton wool.

'Won't we ever come to the end?' demanded Cartwright.

Men were crowding about them now, staring at the crate and breathing loudly. Rollison felt something of their excitement. If these were the relics, then something like a quarter of a million poundsworth of precious stones were about to be displayed.

He picked out a handful of cotton wool.

The tension increased.

Something sparkled like fire in the bright light. There was a loud, sighing sound, as the watching men drew in their breath. The sparkling grew brighter as Rollison cleared away more cotton wool. At last he saw the head of the dancing girl, free from the packing. He stood back, and said quietly: 'Lift the box up, will you? Put it on the other crate.'

The docker obeyed.

Rollison picked off a few stray pieces of cotton wool as he peered closer. Cartwright joined him. Rollison touched the head and peered at it from all sides, and then took his penknife from his pocket and drew it sharply across one of the diamonds. There was no mark when he had finished.

'Well?' Cartwright's voice was hoarse.

'They're genuine all right,' said Rollison.

The dockers jostled around him in an attempt to get a clearer view. On one of their faces was a look of such greed that Rollison straightened up, almost in alarm. He caught Jolly's eye.

'Well, we'd better have them ashore,' Cartwright said sharply.

'Shall we 'ave a dekko at the other crates first, guv'nor?' asked the docker.

'I don't think we need,' said Rollison. 'Let's have them on deck.' He leant nearer to Cartwright and whispered unobtrusively: 'I wouldn't be surprised if there's an attempt to get them back.'

'What, now? No one will dare,' said Cartwright, confidently.

'They'll dare all right,' said Rollison grimly. 'Warn your men, will you?' He walked with Cartwright to the hatch, and added *sotto voce:* 'We might encourage an attempt, don't you think?'

Cartwright shot him a sidelong glance.

'So we might,' he said, thoughtfully. 'So we might. That would catch 'em!' He was whistling under his breath as he climbed on deck, and then waited with Rollison while hefty men raised the crates and carried them out. 'My car will do,' said Cartwright, eager now.

‘Take Jolly with you,’ suggested Rollison, ‘and don’t drive too fast. If there’s no trouble, will you go straight to Scotland Yard?’

Cartwright nodded, and said somewhat drily: ‘As you say.’

Most of the floodlighting had been switched off, and there was only a lane of light shining along the main road. Cartwright’s car stood near the *Baku,* with two uniformed policemen posted near it. The crates were carried to the car and piled inside; there was just room for the three of them. As Rollison finished giving Jolly instructions Cartwright took the wheel with a policeman beside him. He had some difficulty in starting the car, and swore audibly because of it

As he dallied, other men disappeared from the wharf, taking up positions along the road. They made little sound. There was something eerie about the quiet, about that one lane of light, and the ghostly forms of men moving in the single beam.

The engine began to hum. Then the car moved slowly towards the gates. No one appeared in front of it, the police had concealed themselves well, but – *were* other men watching? Had the shabby man been waiting to find out if the crates were discovered, so that he and his men could make another desperate bid to steal them? Rollison could not make up his mind what to expect.

The car reached the gates, and turned right.

Then through the lane of light a small dark thing moved, tossed from an alley-way. A man shouted and began to run, but there was nothing he or others nearby could do; everything depended on Cartwright’s presence of mind.

Cartwright accelerated!

The small thing hit the road, the car went over it, and then there was a vivid flash and a sharp explosion. The back of the car heaved up, then settled again. Rollison and a dozen men raced towards it, and as they did so four men appeared from alleyways, all of them armed.

Rollison recognised Gordon.

The car slewed round, then crashed against a wall. The armed men reached it, but as they did so the police from the nearby hiding places appeared, and as Rollison raced towards the scene, man after man went down beneath heavy blows from truncheons. The would-be attackers, their guns dashed from their hands, did not have a chance. The struggle was over in less than five minutes. Three of the armed men lay unconscious on the ground, the fourth leaned against the wall, covering his head with his hands.

This man wore a wig, and the wig was half-off his bald head.

Rollison said with satisfaction: ‘So we’ve got Jacobson.’

After he had made sure that Jolly and Cartwright were no more than shaken, he went up to the man.

Jacobson turned on him.

‘So you think you’ve won,’ he said, his voice entirely expressionless.

‘I think we’re winning,’ Rollison amended.

And Jacobson laughed.

It was an eerie sound in the darkness, and it startled the men standing about, men filled with satisfaction after the successful capture. Cartwright, still shaky and a little mournful about the damage to his car, came forward and spoke sharply to Jacobson, but nothing could stop his laughter. He was still laughing when other police cars came up and he, Gordon and the two other men were handcuffed and taken off. His laughter seemed to ring in Rollison's ears, cold and chilling, as the car vanished along the main street.

'Well, we've got the stuff,' said Cartwright. 'I suppose it *is* genuine, Rollison?'

'I shouldn't worry about that,' said Rollison, 'but I would like to know why Jacobson laughed.'

As he spoke, there was a shout from behind him, and a man came running from the SS *Baku*.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Why Jacobson Laughed

'A doctor!' the man gasped as he drew up. 'Get a doctor! I've found—'

He could not go on, but the men about him wasted no time. Several hurried immediately to the *Baku* and two others ran for the nearest doctor. Rollison waited only long enough to see the crates loaded into a small van, which started off under an escort of police cars, then he hurried back to the ship with Jolly and Cartwright. Before he arrived, he saw three men bending over a heap huddled on deck, and as he drew nearer he saw that it was the figure of a man. Water was streaming from the man's clothes.

Rollison jumped aboard, letting Jolly go by the gangplank, and reached the little party.

Two policemen turned the huddled body over.

'I don't think there's much chance,' one said.

'He must have been there for hours,' said another.

'Where?' asked Rollison, bending down to see the man's face.

'Over the side,' said the first speaker, 'he was tied up, gagged and hanging in the river, half-submerged. I don't know how Charley found him. Looks a gonner to me, sir.'

Rollison said: 'He *mustn't* die.' As Jolly came up he said in a strained voice: 'We've found Mr Morral.'

Jolly drew in his breath, sharply.

There was no doubt that it was Derek, and little doubt that the police were right, although they started artificial respiration at once and worked in relays. Other men arrived to take over from time to time, while Rollison stared towards the dock gates, impatient for the doctor to arrive. He remembered something like this happening to Katrina, recalling the time when she had been almost strangled in his flat. He felt a fierce anger with himself for ever seriously thinking that Katrina had any sinister part in these crimes.

A car drew up with a high-pitched whine, and a lanky man carrying a bag leapt from it, then walked smartly towards the *Baku*.

'Dr Soames,' he said, briefly, and went down on his knees. He seemed to spend a long time with Derek, lifting his eyelids, feeling his pulse, then suddenly he spoke. 'I think he might be all right. But it's not warm enough here. Better take him below deck.'

'Won't it waste time?' asked Rollison.

'Not enough to worry about,' said Dr Soames.

They carried Derek down, put him on one of the bunks, and set to work again. The cabin grew unbearably hot, sweat running into the men's eyes as they toiled over Derek; but there was no sign of returning life.

Rollison kept seeing a picture of Katrina's face in his mind's eye. Katrina,

so grave, Katrina dancing with Derek as if she were giving him her whole life, forgetful of all the differences and of the unhappiness which the past weeks had brought. He wondered what she would say and do if he had to tell her that Derek was dead.

Then gradually, almost imperceptibly, there was a slight movement of Derek's lips, hardly noticeable unless one peered closely. In half-an-hour's time he was breathing without aid, and although he looked like death, there was no fear that he would die.

Rollison sat down on the side of a bunk, and looked steadily at Jolly.

'I think we know now why Jacobson laughed,' said Jolly.

Rollison said: 'Yes. We'll go and make sure.'

Jacobson and Morgan had refused to make a statement, refused to be helpful in any way. Once again Rollison was surprised by Gordon, whom he had imagined would crack under the strain of interrogation, but although it was nearly four o'clock, and the man had been allowed no rest, Gordon held out.

The other two men talked freely enough, but they could give little information of immediate value. They had been hired only that day for an 'emergency' job, and had understood that it was to be a smash and grab. There was nothing unusual about that, they said, for they had often worked for Jacobson before on similar jobs.

All this, Inspector Hill told Rollison when he reached the Yard, which was in some turmoil because the Chief Constable had said that he was coming to interview the men himself; Hill was nervous, with good reason, of the effect of such intervention, for Merrick was not a good, or popular, C.C.

'I'd like a word with Jacobson first,' Rollison said.

'Well, I don't know,' objected Hill, 'you know what Merrick is. If it was up to me, *I* wouldn't object, but—'

'Grice wouldn't hesitate,' said Rollison.

Hill pulled at his under-lip, and said he supposed there was something in that.

'Oh, all right,' he said, finally, 'but don't be surprised if Merrick leads off.'

Jacobson was on his own, in a small room at the Yard. He had already been charged with being an accessory after the murder of Mary Henderson, with attempted murder, and with attempted robbery with violence. Without his wig, he looked much older than when Rollison had seen him before, but he grinned cheerfully enough when Rollison and Hill entered.

'Still happy?' murmured Rollison.

Jacobson laughed.

'Stop that!' snapped Hill, irritably.

'A joke that's turned tables, I think,' said Rollison pleasantly. 'We've found Derek Morral, Jacobson.'

The man stiffened, then shrugged.

'A lie!'

'He was half-drowned,' said Rollison, 'and still fastened to the *Baku* by a rope, but he's alive. Is it quite so funny now, do you think?'

Jacobson snapped: 'I don't believe you!'

'But it's true,' said Rollison. 'He can tell us a great deal, Jacobson, don't you think? Who the shabby man is, for instance, and how it all started, and who is behind it.'

Jacobson stood, silent and tight-lipped, while Hill looked bewilderedly from one man to the other. 'No no,' Rollison went on, 'you haven't much cause for laughter, Jacobson. Everything will come out, now, believe me. You've been buying and selling stolen jewels for years, haven't you? And Mary Henderson was but one of a hundred agents selling the goods for you on commission, not knowing that they were stolen. At least, not knowing at first. You had the recognisable jewels shipped abroad, and those you could cut and alter you handled in London and sold quite safely, but – *why* did you let some of the Siamese jewels go so soon?'

After a long pause, Jacobson said: 'That was Lorne, the fool.'

'Lorne will talk freely,' Rollison said.

'If the dead can talk,' said Jacobson cynically.

'Well, suppose *you* tell us,' Rollison said, hoping to goad the man into some indiscretion. 'About this shabby man, for instance, who shed his clothes when he went away from the dock, who came and told you and Gordon that we had found the crates and arranged for the second attempt to get them and who left *you* in the lurch. Is he worth such loyalty?' Rollison asked, softly.

Jacobson muttered: 'He'll see me through, he'll always see me through!'

'With murder on your charge sheet?' said Rollison.

'You can't get me on murder!' Jacobson's voice rose as he turned to Hill.

Hill did not speak, and Rollison said: 'You knew that Lorne had murdered Mary Henderson, you took Lorne away and hid him from the police, and that made you an accessory after the fact. Murder is on the charge sheet, nothing will save you from that.'

Jacobson said: 'You can't do it!' He seemed to be more frightened now, but he still spoke defiantly. 'You were fooled from start to finish, you don't know who's really behind it, you'll never know!'

'Won't we?' murmured Rollison.

'Listen,' said Jacobson, and he stepped forward and touched Rollison's arm. 'Listen, Rollison, just this *once* you can't find out the truth, because you've been fooled from the start, see. You've been fooled *tonight.* You thought we tried to murder him, you thought—'

He stopped abruptly, and swung round.

Hill said softly: 'Go on, Jacobson!'

Jacobson said: 'I'm not saying anything more. I won't say another word while Rollison's here, he's got no right to be questioning me.' He stood with his back towards them and his shoulders bowed, and Hill raised his hands helplessly.

'All right, I'll go,' said Rollison.

As he went to the door, Jacobson looked round, and there was a cunning look in his eyes, a look of triumph which startled Rollison, but which Hill

did not see. The next moment Jacobson had turned away, and Rollison went into the cold, stone passages of Scotland Yard, thoughtful, alone.

Merrick was walking along the passage, and stopped at sight of him.

'*You*, Rollison.'

Rollison smiled.

'Hallo! I didn't know you got up so early.'

'Have you been interrogating the prisoners?' Merrick demanded.

'Well,' said Rollison, 'I helped to catch them.'

Merrick looked as if he would like to protest, but, contenting himself with a curt nod, went on. Rollison walked slowly towards the main doors, thinking of Grice. Grice had often warned him that the changes in the hierarchy at Scotland Yard would work to his disadvantage. Older men who had known Rollison since he had started to work, and who had given him plenty of rope, had long since left. There had been many changes and few of the new men looked with approval upon a wealthy 'amateur'. Grice had made things bearable; so did men like Cartwright, but if Grice were unable to come back, there would be great, perhaps insuperable difficulties put in his way.

He made inquiries about Katrina, who was still at Cannon Row Police Station, and the sergeant on duty assured him that she was asleep. From Cannon Row, he telephoned the hospital to inquire about Derek, and the report was good. The Station Sergeant also told him that one of the men had seen Grice that evening, and that Grice was making a wonderful recovery.

Much elated by this news Rollison walked through the starlit streets to Gresham Terrace, pondering on every aspect of the case. Jacobson's cunning glance affected him most; the man believed that he, Rollison, had been fooled, believed also

that the police had been fooled, but he had said a little too much: '*You thought we tried to murder him, you thought—'*

And then he had broken off.

As he entered the flat, Rollison was greeted by an agreeable smell of frying bacon. He had not realised how hungry he was. Leaning against the sink he watched Jolly's deft movements, talking most of the time. What, he demanded, had Jacobson meant? Hadn't they tried to murder Derek? He repeated the question time and time again, while Jolly added two eggs to the bacon, filled a toast rack and carried the meal on a tray into the dining-room.

'No bright thoughts?' demanded Rollison dejectedly. 'Really Jolly, here I come to you—'

'Well, sir—'

'Then spill the beans, Jolly.'

'Well, sir,' said Jolly once again, 'I do not think you can be in any doubt as to Jacobson's meaning. There was only one man who *appeared* to be a victim of a murderous attack tonight, and that man was Mr Morral. Shall I make tea or coffee, sir?'

'But confound it, you *saw* his condition!'

‘I know, sir, but it is not difficult to imagine that he was swung over the side to make it *appear* as if he were drowning,’ said Jolly. ‘It was an eventful night, and I have no doubt that some of the plans that Jacobson and his cronies made went awry. They might, for instance, have planned to “arrange” for us to discover Mr Morral a long time before we did. If that is the case, then naturally we would have assumed that Mr Morral was a victim, not one of the conspirators. That is reasonable, isn’t it?’ suggested Jolly.

‘I suppose so,’ Rollison growled. ‘I don’t want it to be Derek Morral.’

‘I’m very sorry, sir,’ said Jolly, ‘but if the fact is established—’

‘I’m not sure that it *is* established,’ snapped Rollison. ‘Aren’t I to have anything to drink?’

‘Tea or coffee, sir?’ repeated Jolly, tranquilly.

‘Tea, I think,’ said Rollison. He set to on the bacon and eggs, hardly aware of what he was eating as he turned thoughts over and over again in his mind. When Jolly returned with the tea, he said ruminatively: ‘Jolly, there has been something worrying me from the very beginning, something that is so obvious that we’ve missed it. There *must* be a proper explanation of the ice-cream, and if Derek Morral is behind it, there isn’t one.’

Jolly made no comment.

‘And there’s something else,’ said Rollison, ‘something both of us should have thought about a long time ago.’

‘To do with Mr Morral?’

‘Yes,’ said Rollison. ‘How *did* it really start?’ He paused, and looked up at Jolly with a keener expression. ‘One thing has never been explained, Jolly, we took it in our stride, but we should not have done so. The lift, at Green Street. Someone switched the current off both times. So it was someone with ready access to the lift.’

Jolly murmured: ‘I fully agree, sir. And if you remember, Mr *Morral* first thought of the electric current being switched off at the main. That would not have occurred to many people. It did not occur to you, because it appeared unreasonable to think that the current would be switched off at such an hour of the day. But *he* remedied it very quickly, didn’t he?’

Rollison said: ‘Yes. We’d better have a look at that flat, I think.’

‘I wondered if you would like to do that, sir,’ said Jolly. ‘I managed to get Mr Morral’s keys from his pocket while he was being taken from the deck to the cabin, so we can get in quite easily.’

Rollison laughed, shortly. ‘You’ll do. But Morral *isn’t* our shabby man. I’ve seen them meet face to face. Our shabby man is the key to the whole affair.’

‘Not forgetting the ice-cream,’ murmured Jolly.

‘Was that a crack?’ demanded Rollison, wryly.

‘No, sir,’ said Jolly, ‘it just occurred to me that Mr Morral might have been indirectly responsible for the ice-cream disaster. He was there long enough to have given instructions, and he *could* have warned his wife not to eat ice-cream that night. And,’ went on Jolly, warming up, ‘Mr Morral may have arranged to *sell* the relics back to the original owners, hence the

shipment on *SS Baku.* Where were the crates consigned to, sir?'

'A wharfing company in Bangkok,' said Rollison, 'doubtless for collection.'

'Most likely, sir. And who was more likely than Mr Morral to ship them back there?'

After a long pause, Rollison said: 'No, I don't think it works out. It's far too complicated. Crimes, to be successful, must be simple.' He stood up. 'All right, let's go to Chelsea.'

Chapter Twenty-Four

Visit to Green Street

All was quiet in Green Street as Rollison and Jolly walked towards Number 25a. The sound of their taxi engine faded in the distance, and there was no other traffic about. It was pitch dark, and Jolly shone the light of a torch in front of Rollison, turning towards a house only when he judged they were at Number 25a; the light shone on 23.

'Not a bad guess,' said Rollison.

'Shall we use the lift, sir?' asked Jolly.

'Never again in my life shall I use that lift,' declared Rollison, 'and in any case we don't want to wake anyone.'

They walked quickly up the stairs, making little sound, and hearing nothing except the rumble of a heavy lorry which passed not far away.

'Key, present,' said Rollison, as they reached the third floor. 'I—*stop,* Jolly!'

Jolly, the key in his hand, was going forward when Rollison whispered the command, and he obeyed immediately. They stared at the door of Flat 6, which a moment before had been in darkness. *Now there was a thin streak of light beneath.*

'Over here,' whispered Rollison, and drew Jolly towards a shadowy corner.

Derek was still in hospital, and Katrina was at Cannon Row. No one had any right to be in the flat. It crossed Rollison's mind that Old Glory might be making a personal investigation, but he dismissed it at once.

There were footsteps in the hall. At any moment Rollison expected the door to open, but it did not.

Then the light went out.

'A change of mind,' Rollison murmured. 'Can they have heard us?'

'It is most unlikely, sir,' said Jolly.

'All right, let's look at the door.'

He took out his pen-knife and opened the blade which was in fact a skeleton key. A quick examination of the lock pleased him. It was not a Yale or any other patent kind and should be easy to deal with. Jolly shone the light on the keyhole, and Rollison inserted the key and set to work. Several minutes passed before there was a click as the lock turned back.

The noise was loud enough for him to feel sure someone inside the flat had heard it. Almost immediately the ball light was switched on again, and for the first time they heard a voice.

'What was that?'

'I don't know.'

'Be careful!'

It was impossible to recognise the voices, only just possible to distinguish

the words. Rollison touched Jolly's arm, and they moved swiftly away, towards the shadows, expecting every moment to see the door open and light stream into the passage.

Instead, the light went out again.

'Suspicions allayed,' murmured Rollison, with relief. 'All right, we'll go inside, Jolly.'

They opened the door and stepped into the hall. The light was on in the living-room, and they could hear two people moving about, presumably quite convinced of their safety.

Rollison approached the door and stood listening, but no one was speaking now. Occasionally there was a sound as if a piece of furniture was being moved. He wished he had brought a gun, but he had not expected to encounter any trouble at Green Street. The best plan was to wait until the intruders came out again, and to take them by surprise. He stood at one side of the door and Jolly took up his position at the other.

The movements continued, but the door remained closed. Rollison began to find the delay irksome. He was about to turn the handle when there was a loud bang inside the room.

It was followed by complete silence.

Incredulously, they looked at each other. The silence continued until Rollison stepped forward determinedly and turned the handle of the door.

He went in swiftly. *The light was on, but no one was there.* They looked about them bewilderedly. There were no doors, only blank walls—

Blank walls! The wonderful Persian carpets which had been stretched out on the walls were gone, and Rollison realised with a sense of shock that everything of value had been removed from the room. The finely-carved tables, the stool on which he had sat when he had paid his first visit, the beautiful pieces of Oriental silver-work, all were gone.

'Moving day,' said Rollison, blankly.

'There must be a door, sir,' said Jolly.

'I never liked secret doors,' said Rollison, but he went round the walls, examining them closely. Only one could possibly hold a concealed door, for two were outside walls and a third bordered the passage.

The wallpaper was a heavy cream with narrow, decorative strips running downward every two feet or so, strips which might easily conceal the sides of a door. As he examined them, Rollison came to the conclusion that they had been put there for that purpose.

'Shall we tear them off, sir?' asked Jolly, softly.

'We can try,' said Rollison.

He stood on a chair and worked downwards from the picture rail, and Jolly worked upwards from the wainscotting. They removed two pieces and found only the blank wall behind them. At the fifth strip they found the door.

It stretched from wainscotting to picture rail.

'What now, sir?' asked Jolly, still whispering.

'I doubt if we can open it,' said Rollison, inserting his knife into the

narrow gap. It made no impression at all. ‘We’d better find out what’s next door,’ Rollison said. ‘It’s a house in a terrace, remember.’ He led the way into the hall, talking all the time. ‘Now other things are becoming obvious, Jolly. Morral left, or was taken away, through the next-door house, that’s how the police missed him. And someone came through from next door and played tricks with the lift. We don’t know where Katrina stayed on her nights out, but it was probably next-door.’ He walked quickly down the stairs, and Jolly had difficulty in keeping pace with him. At the foot, he said: ‘I think you’d better telephone the Yard, Jolly, and have a flying squad sent here. We don’t want the whole thing messed up. There’s a call-box in the main road.’

‘I don’t like leaving you alone, sir,’ said Jolly.

‘Don’t be an ass,’ said Rollison, shortly.

‘Will you stay outside?’ asked Jolly.

‘I’ll watch my step,’ Rollison assured him.

In the first faint light of morning, he watched Jolly walking towards the corner of the street. As Jolly reached it, a milk van rattled past, bottles clanking against their metal containers. The man was whistling, and Rollison was grateful for the noise, which covered Jolly’s footsteps and any noise that he might make.

Like 25a, the next-door house had been turned into flats, and the front door was unlocked. Rollison shone his torch on to the name board; but the spaces for the names of the tenants of both the top-floor flats were empty.

The house was very silent.

He tiptoed up the stairs and reached the third floor. There was a light beneath the doorway on the right, the doorway of the flat which adjoined Derek’s. There was no sound of movement, and he stepped closer to the door, examining the lock.

It should not be difficult to open.

He put his hand to his pocket, to draw out his knife, when he heard a rustle of sound behind him. In a flash he turned round, and was met by a fist driven viciously at his face. The blow landed on the cheek and he lost his balance. He caught only a vague impression of the man who was attacking him before a second blow struck the back of his head. He collapsed, conscious but helpless, his head whirling, misty lights in front of his eyes.

A soft voice said: ‘What shall we do?’

A man’s hoarse whisper answered: ‘Leave him.’

‘Dare we?’

‘Leave him! We must get away!’

‘But it means leaving all this!’

‘We must get away!’ repeated the man. ‘We’ll drag him inside.’

The man bent down. Rollison opened his eyes, in an attempt to see who it was, but the first flicker of his eyelids attracted attention. The man straightened up and struck him again and this time he lost consciousness.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Simplicity

Jolly was bending over him when he came round, and there were other people in the room. One was Inspector Hill, and Rollison saw his red-rimmed eyes and knew that Hill was fit to drop.

'Don't get up too quickly, sir,' said Jolly, earnestly.

'I'll manage,' said Rollison. 'I've often felt worse.'

His head was throbbing, but he did not think he had been out for long. He sat up, then got to his feet with Jolly's help. The policemen were moving about the flat, talking in undertones, and Hill was sitting at a bureau, making a pretence at going through the papers he found there.

'Is the furniture here?' asked Rollison.

'Everything, as far as I can see,' said Jolly.

'Curious thing, that furniture removal,' Rollison remarked.

'I shouldn't worry about it now, sir, if I were you.'

'I can't help worrying about it,' said Rollison, peevishly. 'What about fingerprints?'

Hill said tiredly: 'We've found none yet, they must have worn gloves.'

'Very thoughtful people,' said Rollison. 'Is there anything I can do?'

'Yes, go home and sleep,' growled Hill.

'Helpful, grateful fellow,' said Rollison, 'but there's something in it. May I borrow a car?'

'Gibson will drive you round,' said Hill, and returned to his papers. Jolly shot him an angry glance, and Gibson came forward, to help Rollison down the stairs. By the time he reached the hall he was walking without assistance. He got into the back of the car, and it was about to start off when Hill came hurrying from the house.

'I say, Rollison,' he said impulsively, 'I *do* appreciate all you've done. I'm afraid I'm tired and irritable, but I *am* grateful. I'm sure Merrick will be, too.'

Rollison smiled. 'All is forgiven!'

'That's very nice of you,' said Hill. 'Do have a good sleep, old man, we shall want your help again later in the day. Look after him, Jolly.'

As the car moved off, Jolly said sternly: 'I do not think I have ever met a policeman for whom I have less regard, sir. How is your head?'

'No worse than I deserve,' said Rollison.

It was good to get home and into bed, to feel a cold compress on his forehead, and to hear Jolly talking soothingly. Then Jolly switched off the light and went out, while Rollison, snug and warm, felt his mind wandering, wandering, back to that infernal ice-cream. Then, suddenly, he was wakeful. He called out for Jolly, who came hurrying in.

'Jolly, telephone the hospital where Mr Morral is lying! There'll be a

policeman by his bed. Find out the name of the man who suggested Derek should go to Gordon's agency,'

'Supposing Mr Morral is asleep, sir?'

'They'll have to wake him up,' said Rollison. 'I've got the answer to the ice-cream. '

'You have, sir!'

'Yes. What fools we were. The only one who could *safely* play tricks with it was Florence Hardy, who doled the stuff out. And if it was Tips who sent Derek to Gordon's agency, we've got them both.'

Jolly said: 'Hadn't I better ask the police to watch Mr Tippets and Miss Hardy before I do anything else, sir?'

'If you like,' said Rollison, 'but they won't take fright, they feel too safe.'

Next morning, Tips and Florence came into the living-room, glowing with excitement and the joys of life. Rollison had probably guessed before, they told him, that they were getting married. It was to be that very day and they hoped he would act as witness at a quiet little affair at the registrar's office; if, of course, he felt well enough.

'Oh, I'm all right,' said Rollison, looking at the beaming Tips. 'Why were you so reluctant to let the world know about the engagement, Tips?'

Tips shrugged. 'Always been rather that way. Hate publicity.'

'Well, congratulations!'

'Thanks,' grinned Tips.

'Honeymoon?' asked Rollison.

'Oh, a little trip to the country,' said Tips, 'nothing very grand. Comfortable and on our own, and that's what matters most. Came to thank you, you know, for bringing us together. Hadn't met before your party, so it had *some* good results. Any news of how things are going?'

'We had some excitement last night,' said Rollison.

'Yes, I heard. Read it in the newspapers. They made much of the Toff.'

'Well, he comes in useful when they've a blank line or two to fill up,' said Rollison lazily.

'I see Katrina has been released, and Derek's all right,' said Tips. 'Can't forget what they were like that night at *Kundle's,* you know. Absolutely on top of the world. Smashing show they put up, too. Shame they've had so much trouble. Er—Florence has something to tell you.'

Florence was suddenly sober, and a little embarrassed.

'As a matter of fact, Rolly, it's a small thing, and I don't really want to talk about it on this day of days, but Tips says you ought to know. It's about Katrina. There's all this mystery of *why* she won't say anything, but I think I can solve it.'

'Then don't waste time,' said Rollison, leaning forward.

'Well, I *may* be wrong', said Florence, round-eyed, 'but Katrina once nearly broke down and told me she was afraid that Derek was—well, she seemed to think that Derek knew more than he pretended of what has been happening. It's absurd, of course, but she believes that Derek is responsible

for it. I wouldn't have said a word, only after what happened to Derek last night, no one can possibly believe that of him. You see, she wouldn't let him down. It was rather – wonderful, wasn't it?'

'I suppose it was,' said Rollison, slowly. 'Yes, very wonderful. Loyalty and love, a good mixture. But where did she go o' nights? And what had she to do with Lorne and Jacobson?'

'Isn't that *obvious*?' demanded Florence, and went on intently: 'She wanted to find out the truth, she thought she could do it by meeting the men with whom she thought Derek was working. Now that we all know Derek couldn't have done it, it doesn't matter. Will you tell Katrina soon?'

'I'm expecting her in half-an-hour,' said Rollison. 'She was released this morning, and has gone to the hospital.'

'I'm *so* glad! And you will be a witness? The—er—ceremony is at two-thirty, at the Marylebone Registry Office.'

Rollison said, half-laughing: 'And where's the reception?'

'Oh, we're not worrying about that!'

'What? No ice-cream?' asked Rollison, lightly.

Tips said quickly: 'Don't mention that stuff, Rolly. Unpleasant associations. Come on, Florence, we've much to do. Do come, Rolly. Thanks for everything. Sorry I couldn't help more.' He got up, and took out his cigarette-case. 'Quite safe, this time,' he added, with a grin.

'You should know,' said Rollison. He also stood up, and rested a hand on Florence's shoulder. It did not appear to be a particularly friendly hand. 'Florence,' he said, 'I wish I could give you my blessing. I can't, of course. Wasn't it a pity you dropped the whole tube in, glass and all, and not just the arsenic. Careless, don't you think?'

Florence stared at him, and there was utter silence in the room.

The silence lengthened. Tips stood with the cigarette case held out for a petrified few seconds, then snapped it shut and put it into his pocket. He kept his hand there, 'Gone mad?' he asked.

'Gone simple,' said Rollison. 'How often I've talked of the simple things. Of *course* Florence was the dispenser of arsenic. She was most insistent on taking over the ice-cream. Jolly told me so. Nicely planned, wasn't it? A pinch of arsenic in the ice of everyone who might cause trouble, and then she spoilt it by dropping the whole tube in – why *didn't* I think of it before?'

Tips said: 'You're making a fool of yourself.'

Rollison said: 'Oh? Sure it isn't the other way round? I know you're holding a gun, but you won't improve matters that way, you know.'

Tips said thickly: 'I haven't a gun, but I'd like to break your neck! Apologise to Florence.'

'How can I when she's the villainess of the piece?' asked Rollison. 'Jolly, telephone Inspector Hill—'

'Keep away from that telephone!' cried Tips, and he snatched an automatic from his pocket and pointed it towards Jolly. 'Don't move, Jolly, or—'

Rollison pushed Florence forward, and she bumped into Tips. Tips

staggered back, and Rollison went after him, gripped his wrist and forced him to release his hold on the gun. Tips tried to struggle, but Rollison's hold was too painful; the blood drained from the man's face.

Florence rushed towards the door, but Jolly reached it first. Tips said in a strangled voice: 'What in the world makes you think Florence—'

'Why waste time?' Rollison asked, and let him go, picked up the gun and dropped it into his pocket. 'You knew all the time, Tips, didn't you, but you were so much in love with her that you didn't let it stop you. Reason for the secret engagement and hurried wedding, a husband cannot be forced to give evidence against his wife.' He laughed, harshly. 'I don't know whether to be sorry for you or not.'

Tips said: 'Rollison—'

'It had dawned on me before you arrived,' Rollison said. 'That simple explanation of the ice-cream on the party night I should have thought of it before. Stupid of me. But once having dawned I knew there could be no doubt. When did you find out? Did you see her drop the tube in?'

Tips did not speak. Florence stood by the door, Jolly's hand on her arm. She looked very tiny and lost, standing there staring round-eyed at Rollison.

'So you did,' said Rollison. 'Mary didn't take the arsenic, of course, Florence did. Mary was afterwards persuaded to "confess", which wasn't difficult as she had worked for Lorne and Jacobson for so long. Mary was doubtless proving difficult when Lorne went to see her, that's why he killed her. Florence has also worked with Lorne and Jacobson for a long time, I've no doubt. And so heard of those priceless relics, and started to work on Katrina. How *did* you persuade her to leave Derek so often?' When she did not answer, he went on: 'You may as well answer now, you know. I've asked her to come here, by the way.'

Into the silence that followed, the front door bell rang. Rollison took out the automatic and covered Florence, while Jolly went to open the door. In came Katrina, brighter-eyed than Rollison had seen her except on that night at *Kundle's,* but she drew back quickly when she saw Florence and Tips.

'Katrina,' said Rollison, gently, 'did Florence tell you that Derek was planning to steal those jewels? Did she convince you that you could only prevent it by going to see Lorne and Jacobson?'

Katrina said: 'Why, yes, she believed—'

'She believed nothing of the kind!' snapped Rollison. 'What on earth made you take her word for it?'

Katrina said: 'Derek was—was so strange, so worried about the jewels, he —' She broke off.

'He knew that thieves were after them,' declared Rollison, 'and was afraid you were involved. It would never have worked with average people, but with romantics like Derek and you it worked perfectly. You didn't know that Tips and Florence had a flat next door to you, did you? One with a door which led into your living-room, and of course they heard the talk about the jewels from that doorway, and so began the whole affair. Lorne, Jacobson, Gordon, all were in it from the beginning. All worked for you, Florence,

didn't they?'

Florence, standing motionless, did not speak.

Rollison went on: 'You see how easily it all fits into place now, Katrina? You could have told us how Florence had convinced you that Derek was behind it, which meant that you were dangerous, and so they planned your death. Earlier, through Lorne, they made you stay away from Derek. If they could have kept you estranged, there would have been less danger. But you couldn't keep away. You were going to my party, they heard you and Old Glory discuss that at the flat, and there and then came the inspiration; murder, among a crowd, murder with dozens of suspects. And Lorne and Jacobson, of course, were better dead than alive. So Florence invited them and planned to dose them also.'

'Is it *possible*?' gasped Katrina.

'Look at them,' said Rollison, scathingly.

'Rollison, I—I'm in love with Florence, I had—' began Tips, but he stopped when Rollison swung round on him and cried: 'You've not a hope, Tips, of convincing me. You were in it from the start, for *you were the shabby man!* You were at the docks last night, you arranged for the cases to be shipped aboard the *Baku,* cases which were to be taken off at Rangoon, the first port of call. When the jewels were safely out of England, you could sell in Burma for far higher prices than in England. And *you* tried to strangle Katrina, *you* tried to drown Derek, *you* had planned to get him from the hospital and make him disappear. With the furniture gone it would look like flight, well-planned, well-meditated flight. You went wrong once,' he added, in a calmer voice, 'you let Florence wear that brooch, a piece of foolish bravado. You didn't think the individual stones would be recognised, did you?'

'But Rolly, they, too, were hurt, they were poisoned—' Katrina exclaimed in distress.

'Insulin is no danger to anyone who has prepared against it, ' said Rollison. 'And Florence is a diabetic, so has access to insulin. You see how it all fits in? All right, Jolly, open the door and call the police. You see,' he added to Tips and Florence, 'they've been watching you all day. I asked them too.'

Superintendent Grice had a new face. It changed him, but there was no obvious disfigurement.

'After forty years or so of the same mug one gets tired of it, it's not bad to have a change,' he said gaily. He sat in an easy chair on the verandah of a convalescent home in Surrey, and looked at Rollison, who lounged back in a deck-chair, talking, more volubly than usual, to hide the affection and admiration he felt for this brave man.

Rollison had come to tell the whole story. He finished with a grin and a flourish.

'Katrina and Derek have gone to Hungary, Derek's at the Embassy there, and they are quite gloriously happy. And as you know, Tippets and Florence,

got life sentences a week ago, as well as Jacobson and Gordon, all as accessories to the murder. The relics are back in their Siamese temple. Old Glory is secretly delighted because she is sure that I am what she calls "myself again", and Jolly and I are congratulating ourselves because you'll soon be back at the Yard.'

Grice laughed.

'Whoever is at the Yard, you'll do what takes your fancy, as you've always done.'

'Unkind,' chided Rollison.

'But true. I haven't quite followed the part which Jacobson and Lorne played,' Grice said, dismissing badinage. 'They bought and sold stolen jewels, of course—'

'They did more,' said Rollison, 'they ran a smash-and-grab gang, and they sold through commission agents like Mary Henderson. They were financed by Tippets, who always had plenty of money, but was just' – he shrugged his shoulders – 'bad inside and outside, shall we say? Florence wasn't much better. Lorne and Jacobson were demanding too much, and this last minute plan to polish them off at Gresham Terrace appealed to both Tips and Florence. Katrina first spoiled it by refusing ice-cream, and I fancy that Lorne or Jacobson discovered what was up, and probably startled Florence into dropping the whole tube into the bucket before he left.'

'Then why was Jacobson afterwards so loyal?'

Rollison said: 'Oh, come! His one chance was that Derek would be found guilty of the crimes. He didn't worry about being sent down on robbery and receiving charges, but murder had to be avoided. So he tried to make me believe that Morral had been dropped over the side as a trick. A little too tricky,' said Rollison, and then espied a nurse bearing down on him. 'It looks as if my time's up, old chap, is anything else worrying you?'

Grice said: 'Yes. When did you think of Florence Hardy as the arsenic dispenser?'

'I went to bed one night thinking of ice-cream and woke up next morning to see her in my mind's eye, serving the ices out. And I remembered Jolly saying she had insisted on doing that job, a fact which I told you. So I asked Hill to have her and Tips watched thinking they might take flight. They were so sure of themselves, however, that they came to ask my blessing.'

'What I can't understand is, that it was Tippets who told us about the arsenic in the ice-cream,' said Grice.

'An astute move, once things had gone wrong, and in keeping with his quickness of mind,' said Rollison. 'Florence also took a mouthful, so that she could show symptoms. Tips was up to the tricks all right. He punched Lorne in sight of my window, but Lorne did not make a fuss. The reason is clear enough now; Tips could safely do it, being his boss, and wanted to impress me.'

Grice said: 'But why did Tippets want to kill Katrina? And why didn't he kill her when she stayed in the next door flat?'

'He avoided murder for as long as possible,' Rollison pointed out, 'but

once you and I were on the warpath Katrina was the great danger. Tips couldn't be sure her loyalty to Derek would stand the strain.'

'Your time is up, sir,' murmured the nurse, and glided away.

Rollison rummaged beneath his chair and brought up a large square box wrapped in brown paper. Grice asked what it was as they shook hands, and Rollison laughed.

'Jolly's new bowler,' he said. 'He's wearing an old one as penance, and I can't bear to see it any longer.'

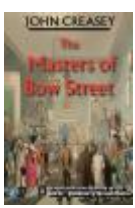
Series Information

Published or to be published by
House of Stratus

Dates given are those of first publication
Alternative titles in brackets

'The Baron' (47 titles) (writing as Anthony Morton)
'Department 'Z'' (28 titles)
'Dr. Palfrey Novels' (34 titles)
'Gideon of Scotland Yard' (22 titles)
'Inspector West' (43 titles)
'Sexton Blake' (5 titles)
'The Toff' (59 titles)

along with:



The Masters of Bow Street
This epic novel embraces the story of the Bow Street Runners and the Marine Police, forerunners of the modern police force, who were founded by novelist Henry Fielding in 1748. They were the earliest detective force operating from the courts to enforce the decisions of magistrates. John Creasey's account also gives a fascinating insight into family life of the time and the struggle between crime and justice, and ends with the establishment of the Metropolitan Police after the passing of Peel's Act in 1829.

'The Baron' Series

These Titles can be read as a series, or randomly as standalone novels

1. Meet the Baron *(The Man in the Blue Mask) (1937)*
2. The Baron Returns *(The Return of the Blue Mask) (1937)*

3. The Baron Again *(Salute Blue Mask) (1938)*
4. The Baron at Bay *(Blue Mask at Bay) (1938)*
5. Alias the Baron *(Alias Blue Mask) (1939)*
6. The Baron at Large *(Challenge Blue Mask!) (1939)*
7. Versus the Baron *(Blue Mask Strikes Again) (1940)*
8. Call for the Baron *(Blue Mask Victorious) (1940)*
9. The Baron Comes Back *(1943)*
10. A Case for the Baron *(1945)*
11. Reward for the Baron *(1945)*
12. Career for the Baron *(1946)*
13. Blood Diamond *(The Baron and the Beggar) (1947)*
14. Blame the Baron *(1948)*
15. A Rope for the Baron *(1948)*
16. Books for the Baron *(1949)*
17. Cry for the Baron *(1950)*
18. Trap the Baron *(1950)*
19. Attack the Baron *(1951)*
20. Shadow the Baron *(1951)*
21. Warn the Baron *(1952)*
22. The Baron Goes East *(1953)*
23. The Baron in France *(1953)*
24. Danger for the Baron *(1953)*
25. The Baron Goes Fast *(1954)*
26. Nest-Egg for the Baron *(Deaf, Dumb and Blonde) (1954)*
27. Help from the Baron *(1955)*
28. Hide the Baron *(1956)*
29. The Double Frame *(Frame the Baron) (1957)*
30. Blood Red *(Red Eye for the Baron) (1958)*
31. If Anything Happens to Hester *(Black for the Baron) (1959)*
32. Salute for the Baron *(1960)*
33. The Baron Branches Out *(A Branch for the Baron) (1961)*
34. The Baron and the Stolen Legacy *(Bad for the Baron) (1962)*
35. A Sword for the Baron *(The Baron and the Mogul Swords) (1963)*
36. The Baron on Board *(The Mask of Sumi) (1964)*
37. The Baron and the Chinese Puzzle *(1964)*
38. Sport for the Baron *(1966)*
39. Affair for the Baron *(1967)*
40. The Baron and the Missing Old Masters *(1968)*
41. The Baron and the Unfinished Portrait *(1969)*
42. Last Laugh for the Baron *(1970)*
43. The Baron Goes A-Buying *(1971)*
44. The Baron and the Arrogant Artist *(1972)*
45. Burgle the Baron *(1973)*
46. The Baron - King Maker *(1975)*
47. Love for the Baron *(1979)*

'Department Z' Novels

These Titles can be read as a series, or randomly as standalone novels

1. The Death Miser *(1932)*
2. Redhead *(1934)*
3. First Came a Murder *(1934)*
4. Death Round the Corner *(1935)*
5. The Mark of the Crescent *(1935)*
6. Thunder in Europe *(1936)*
7. The Terror Trap *(1936)*
8. Carriers of Death *(1937)*
9. Days of Danger *(1937)*
10. Death Stands By *(1938)*
11. Menace! *(1938)*
12. Murder Must Wait *(1939)*
13. Panic! *(1939)*
14. Death by Night *(1940)*
15. The Island of Peril *(1940)*
16. Sabotage *(1941)*
17. Go Away Death *(1941)*
18. The Day of Disaster *(1942)*
19. Prepare for Action *(1942)*
20. No Darker Crime *(1943)*
21. Dark Peril *(1944)*
22. The Peril Ahead *(1946)*
23. The League of Dark Men *(1947)*
24. The Department of Death *(1949)*
25. The Enemy Within *(1950)*
26. Dead or Alive *(1951)*
27. A Kind of Prisoner *(1954)*
28. The Black Spiders *(1957)*

Doctor Palfrey Novels

These Titles can be read as a series, or randomly as standalone novels

1. Traitor's Doom *(1942)*
2. The Legion of the Lost *(1943)*
3. The Valley of Fear *(The Perilous Country) (1943)*
4. Dangerous Quest *(1944)*
5. Death in the Rising Sun *(1945)*

6. The Hounds of Vengeance *(1945)*
7. Shadow of Doom *(1946)*
8. The House of the Bears *(1946)*
9. Dark Harvest *(1947)*
10. The Wings of Peace *(1948)*
11. The Sons of Satan *(1948)*
12. The Dawn of Darkness *(1949)*
13. The League of Light *(1949)*
14. The Man Who Shook the World *(1950)*
15. The Prophet of Fire *(1951)*
16. The Children of Hate *(The Killers of Innocence; The Children of Despair) (1952)*
17. The Touch of Death *(1954)*
18. The Mists of Fear *(1955)*
19. The Flood *(1956)*
20. The Plague of Silence *(1958)*
21. Dry Spell *(The Drought) (1959)*
22. The Terror *(1962)*
23. The Depths *(1963)*
24. The Sleep *(1964)*
25. The Inferno *(1965)*
26. The Famine *(1967)*
27. The Blight *(1968)*
28. The Oasis *(1970)*
29. The Smog *(1970)*
30. The Unbegotten *(1971)*
31. The Insulators *(1972)*
32. The Voiceless Ones *(1973)*
33. The Thunder-Maker *(1976)*
34. The Whirlwind *(1979)*

Gideon Series

(Writing as JJ Marric)

These Titles can be read as a series, or randomly as standalone novels

1. Gideon's Day *(Gideon of Scotland Yard) (1955)*
2. Seven Days to Death *(Gideon's Week) (1956)*
3. Gideon's Night *(1957)*
4. A Backwards Jump *(Gideon's Month) (1958)*
5. Thugs and Economies *(Gideon's Staff) (1959)*
6. Gideon Combats Influence *(Gideon's Risk) (1960)*
7. Gideon's Fire *(1961)*

8. A Conference for Assassins *(Gideon's March) (1962)*
9. Travelling Crimes *(Gideon's Ride) (1963)*
10. An Uncivilised Election *(Gideon's Vote) (1964)*
11. Criminal Imports *(Gideon's Lot) (1965)*
12. To Nail a Serial Killer *(Gideon's Badge) (1966)*
13. From Murder to a Cathedral *(Gideon's Wrath) (1967)*
14. Gideon's River *(1968)*
15. Darkness and Confusion *(Gideon's Power) (1969)*
16. Sport, Heat & Scotland Yard *(Gideon's Sport) (1970)*
17. Gideon's Art *(1971)*
18. No Relaxation at Scotland Yard *(Gideon's Men) (1972)*
19. Impartiality Against the Mob *(Gideon's Press) (1973)*
20. Not Hidden by the Fog *(Gideon's Fog) (1975)*
21. Good and Justice *(Gideon's Drive) (1976)*
22. Vigilantes & Biscuits *(Gideon's Force) (1978)*

Inspector West Series

These Titles can be read as a series, or randomly as standalone novels

1. Inspector West Takes Charge *(1942)*
2. Go Away to Murder *(Inspector West Leaves Town) (1943)*
3. An Apostle of Gloom *(Inspector West At Home) (1944)*
4. Inspector West Regrets *(1945)*
5. Holiday for Inspector West *(1946)*
6. Battle for Inspector West *(1948)*
7. The Case Against Paul Raeburn *(Triumph for Inspector West) (1948)*
8. Inspector West Kicks Off *(Sport for Inspector West) (1949)*
9. Inspector West Alone *(1950)*
10. Inspector West Cries Wolf *(The Creepers) (1950)*
11. The Figure in the Dusk *(A Case for Inspector West) (1951)*
12. The Dissemblers *(Puzzle for Inspector West) (1951)*
13. The Case of the Acid Throwers *(The Blind Spot; Inspector West at Bay) (1952)*
14. Give a Man a Gun *(A Gun for Inspector West) (1953)*
15. Send Inspector West *(1953)*
16. So Young, So Cold, So Fair *(A Beauty for Inspector West; The Beauty Queen Killer) (1954)*
17. Murder Makes Haste *(Inspector West Makes Haste; The Gelignite Gang; Night of the Watchman) (1955)*
18. Murder: One, Two, Three *(Two for Inspector West) (1955)*
19. Death of a Postman *(Parcels for Inspector West) (1956)*
20. Death of an Assassin *(A Prince for Inspector West) (1956)*
21. Hit and Run *(Accident for Inspector West) (1957)*

22. The Trouble at Saxby's *(Find Inspector West; Doorway to Death) (1957)*
23. Murder, London - New York *(1958)*
24. Strike for Death *(The Killing Strike) (1958)*
25. Death of a Racehorse *(1959)*
26. The Case of the Innocent Victims *(1959)*
27. Murder on the Line *(1960)*
28. Death in Cold Print *(1961)*
29. The Scene of the Crime *(1961)*
30. Policeman's Dread *(1962)*
31. Hang the Little Man *(1963)*
32. Look Three Ways at Murder *(1964)*
33. Murder, London - Australia *(1965)*
34. Murder, London - South Africa *(1966)*
35. The Executioners *(1967)*
36. So Young to Burn *(1968)*
37. Murder, London - Miami *(1969)*
38. A Part for a Policeman *(1970)*
39. Alibi for Inspector West *(1971)*
40. A Splinter of Glass *(1972)*
41. The Theft of Magna Carta *(1973)*
42. The Extortioners *(1974)*
43. A Sharp Rise in Crime *(1978)*

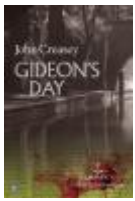
'The Toff' Series

These Titles can be read as a series, or randomly as standalone novels

1. Introducing the Toff *(It's the Toff!) (1938)*
2. The Toff Goes On *(1939)*
3. The Toff Steps Out *(1939)*
4. Here Comes the Toff *(1940)*
5. The Toff Breaks In *(1940)*
6. Salute the Toff *(1941)*
7. The Toff Proceeds *(1941)*
8. The Toff Goes to Market *(1942)*
9. The Toff Is Back *(1942)*
10. The Toff on the Trail *(short stories) (1942)*
11. The Toff among the Millions *(1943)*
12. Accuse the Toff *(1943)*
13. The Toff and the Deadly Priest *(The Toff and the Curate) (1944)*
14. The Toff and the Great Illusion *(1944)*
15. Feathers for the Toff *(1945)*
16. The Toff and the Lady *(1946)*

17. Poison for the Toff *(The Toff on Ice) (1946)*
18. Hammer the Toff *(1947)*
19. The Toff in Town *(1948)*
20. The Toff Takes Shares *(1948)*
21. The Toff and Old Harry *(1949)*
22. The Toff on Board *(1949)*
23. Fool the Toff *(1950)*
24. Kill the Toff *(1950)*
25. A Knife for the Toff *(1951)*
26. A Mask for the Toff *(The Toff Goes Gay) (1951)*
27. Hunt the Toff *(1952)*
28. Call the Toff *(1953)*
29. The Toff Down Under *(Break the Toff) (1953)*
30. Murder Out of the Past *(short stories) (1953)*
31. The Toff at Camp *(The Toff at Butlins) (1954)*
32. The Toff at the Fair *(1954)*
33. A Six for the Toff *(A Score for the Toff) (1955)*
34. The Toff and the Deep Blue Sea *(1955)*
35. Kiss the Toff *(Make-Up for the Toff) (1956)*
36. The Toff in New York *(1956)*
37. Model for the Toff *(1957)*
38. The Toff on Fire *(1957)*
39. The Toff and the Stolen Tresses *(1958)*
40. Terror for the Toff *(The Toff on the Farm) (1958)*
41. Double for the Toff *(1959)*
42. The Toff and the Runaway Bride *(1959)*
43. A Rocket for the Toff *(1960)*
44. The Toff and the Kidnapped *(The Kidnapped Child) (1960)*
45. Follow the Toff *(1961)*
46. The Toff and the Toughs *(The Toff and the Teds) (1961)*
47. A Doll for the Toff *(1963)*
48. Leave It to the Toff *(1963)*
49. The Toff and the Spider *(1965)*
50. The Toff in Wax *(1966)*
51. A Bundle for the Toff *(1967)*
52. Stars for the Toff *(1968)*
53. The Toff and the Golden Boy *(1969)*
54. The Toff and the Fallen Angels *(1970)*
55. Vote for the Toff *(1971)*
56. The Toff and the Trip-Trip-Triplets *(1972)*
57. The Toff and the Terrified Taxman *(1973)*
58. The Toff and the Sleepy Cowboy *(1975)*
59. The Toff and the Crooked Copper *(1977)*

Select Synopses

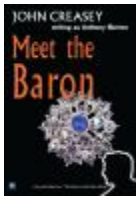


Gideon's Day
Gideon's day is a busy one. He balances family commitments with solving a series of seemingly unrelated crimes from which a plot nonetheless evolves and a mystery is solved. One of the most senior officers within Scotland Yard, George Gideon's crime solving abilities are in the finest traditions of London's world famous police headquarters. His analytical brain and sense of fairness is respected by colleagues and villains alike.

Gideon's Night
On this particular night Commander George Gideon has to deal with a couple of psychopaths who trail pain and blood in their wake. One targets infants, and the other young women on London's foggy streets. There's also an explosive gang war in the offing, and one way or another all of these cases are coming to their breathtaking conclusions at the same time. Can Scotland Yard's finest cope with such a nightmarish scenario, with what would ordinarily be months of time consuming police work crammed into just one night?

Gideon's Fire
Commander George Gideon of Scotland Yard has to deal successively with news of a mass murderer, a depraved maniac, and the deaths of a family in an arson attack on an old building south of the river. This leaves little time for the crisis developing at home . . .

Meet the Baron
John Mannering (*The Baron*) makes

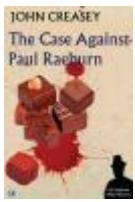


his first appearance in this volume. Lord Fauntley cannot help showing off both his daughter and the security under which his precious jewels are kept. Mannering finds himself attracted to both .... Money is tight and so he plans a burglary, but this fails and unexpected consequnces result. The relationship with Lorna Fauntley flourishes, and a series of high profile thefts and adventures ensure Mannering's future, so he believes, until Lorna equates him with *The Baron*. One of the many further twists in this award winning novel occurs when the police appear to seek Mannering's help, only to have everything turned upside down as the plot develops . . .

Shadow The Baron
John Mannering ('*The Baron*') is called in by Scorland Yard's Superintendent Bristow to help catch the mysterious jewel thief '*The Shadow*'. No one know the thief's identity, but he has managed to pull off many high profile robberies. However, as Mannering proceeds to track down the target, he finds the pursuer becomes the pursued . . . ..

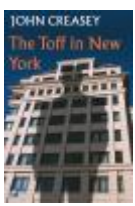
The House of the Bears
Standing alone in the bleak Yorkshire Moors is Sir Rufus Marne's *'House of the Bears'*. Dr. Palfrey is asked to journey there to examine an invalid - whom he finds has disappeared. Moreover, Marne's daughter lies terribly injured after a fall from the minstrel's gallery, which Dr. Palfrey discovers was no accident. He sets out to look into both matters, but the discoveries he makes are truly fantastic. A deserted mine, powerful explosive and a submarine all feature in this powerful mystery. The results are even capable of surprising him ...

Inspector West Takes Charge
Extortion is the name of the game, as one victim after another is ruthlessly targeted. Chief Inspector Roger West must now solve the problem, along with a tangle of murders - but the case becomes more frightening as every minute passes.



The Case Against Paul Raeburn
Chief Inspector Roger West has been watching and waiting for over two years - he is determined to catch Paul Raeburn out. The millionaire racketeer may have made a mistake, following the killing of a small time crook. Can the ace detective triumph over the evil Raeburn in what are very difficult circumstances? This cannot be assumed as not eveything, it would seem, is as simple as it first appears .....

Introducing The Toff
The Toff is the Hon. Richard Rollison; the ultimate sleuth who revels in solving crimes. Whilst returning home across the Essex countryside from a day's cricket at his father's Norfolk home, he happens upon an accident that sets him on a new trail. This involves murder, suspense and thrilling action as The Toff applies his mind with its usual precision and thoroughness.



The Toff in New York
'Say, Miss Hall, I hope that brother of yours hasn't run into any trouble.' But Will Hall had been kidnapped and the Honourable Richard Rollison, known by many by the apt if absurd soubriquet of the *'Toff'* is soon on the scene, but not before a murdered man had fallen into Valerie Hallís arms. There's lots of action in 'millionaire surroundings', with a rich private eye

and the NYPD all on the case, whilst the Toff tracks Dutch Himmy, surely the worst man in New York . . . ..

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